University of Alberta

The Politics of Poetry: Plato's Ion

by

Patrick Anthony Kernahan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Political Science

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1997

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-22534-8

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Patrick Anthony Kernahan

Title of Thesis: The Politics of Poetry: Plato's Ion.

Degree: Master of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1997

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Patrick Kernahan

Patrick Anthony Kernahan
3543 - 106A Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T6J-1A7

Date: Aug. 28, 1997

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *The Politics of Poetry: Plato's Ion* submitted by Patrick Anthony Kernahan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. ~~Leon H.~~ Craig, Supervisor.

Dr. Heidi Studer.

Dr. Robert Burch.

Date: 25 August '97

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a detailed study of Plato's dialogue Ion, which depicts a short conversation between the philosopher Socrates and a rhapsode (reciter of Homer) named Ion. Having argued that any serious attempt to interpret a Platonic dialogue must pay close attention to its drama, I explore various possible answers to an obvious yet highly perplexing question about the Ion: Why does Socrates choose to speak to a man who is apparently so philosophically unpromising? I eventually conclude that the philosopher begins the dialogue with a view to learning more about various aspects of poetry and poetic inspiration, but that once the discussion has begun he also manifests a concern to act justly towards or benefit his interlocutor. Thus the philosopher's explicit doctrines and arguments are designed both to try to learn about and from Ion and to provide the rhapsode with a salutary account of his way of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should begin by thanking my family for their patience and support throughout the course of my education, and particularly as I struggled to complete this thesis.

I would also like to thank Heidi Studer for the many things which I have learnt from her both over the years and with respect to this thesis in particular.

The greatest debt which I incurred in writing this thesis is to my supervisor, Professor Leon Craig. His lectures, seminars and conversation, as well as his personal example, have been an invaluable part of my philosophic education.

I should also thank the members of my committee collectively for their patience with and assistance in overcoming the many difficulties which I encountered in writing this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

I: INTERPRETING PLATO 1

II: INTERPRETING THE ION 21

III: THE STRATEGY OF THIS ESSAY 28

CHAPTER 1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ION 31

CHAPTER 2: THE PROBLEM OF THE ION 37

CHAPTER 3: THE DRAMA OF THE ION 61

I: THE TITLE AND DRAMATIC SETTING 61

II: THE PRELUDE 67

III: PART I: THE TECHNE OF THE RHAPSODE PART I 72

IV: PART II: THE RHAPSODE'S DIVINE INSPIRATION 97

V: PART III: THE TECHNE OF THE RHAPSODE PART II AND CONCLUSION 111

BIBLIOGRAPHY 124

INTRODUCTION

I: INTERPRETING PLATO

This thesis is a detailed study of Plato's dialogue Ion. Given the almost bewildering diversity of approaches that various scholars and philosophers have brought to the task of interpreting the Platonic dialogues, it is necessary that I preface the body of my essay with some general remarks concerning the hermeneutical principles in the light of which I have tried to read the Ion. Naturally, the Introduction to a Master's Thesis can provide neither a complete discussion of my own views on the thorny issue of Plato interpretation nor comprehensive accounts of and challenges to various competing opinions.[1] More radically, no "Introduction" as such can provide a full justification of a given hermeneutical approach[2]; each reader must read and ponder the Ion for himself and only then attempt to decide whether and to what extent my interpretive principles and my specific applications of these principles "fit" with the Platonic text. I do however think that we can legitimately demand that all who would interpret Plato acknowledge a priori at least two "pre-interpretive" principles. The first is the difficulty of this task, the fact that every serious interpretation of a Platonic dialogue entails an attempt to reveal something of "Plato's

---

[1]The best general accounts of the approach I have adopted in this study are: L. Strauss, The City and Man, pp. 50-62; L. H. Craig's "Prologue" to The War Lover; and S. Rosen's "Introduction" to his Plato's Symposium. For useful surveys of the history of Plato interpretation, see A. Bowen, "On Interpreting Plato", pp. 52-55, and E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato.

[2]Cf. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, Preface, sections 1-3, with C. Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy", p. 153.

secrecy and sphinx nature".[3] The most obvious evidence in support of this point is, of course, the enormous array of fundamental disagreements among interpreters of very high intelligence about what Plato intended to accomplish in writing his dialogues. The second point is that scholarship with any claim at all to provide us with an accurate account of Plato can proceed only on the basis of an attempt to understand this Platonic intention, however difficult it may be to discover.[4] If, as some assert, it is impossible to understand the intentions of a past thinker as he himself understood them, then the very existence of Platonic scholarship is an absurdity, and indeed the very attempt to read any philosopher is an absurdity. Advocates of this brand of extreme historicism would be well advised to read Plato with an open mind precisely in order to find a radical challenge to their belief.[5]

Speaking most generally, there are two contrasting approaches to the Platonic

---

[3]Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, aphorism 28.

[4]I say Plato's intention and not his beliefs since it may well be that his intention includes the concealment or partial concealment of some of his beliefs. Even an interpreter such as Alan C. Bowen who argues that Plato's texts do not convey his opinions and are evidence of nothing beyond themselves ("On Interpreting Plato", pp. 57-65) is forced to concede that there are texts for which this is not the case (ibid., p. 59), and hence entitles us to conclude that Plato chose to conceal his opinions, and thus to speculate on his intention in so doing. Compare L. Strauss, The City and Man, p. 55ff, who acknowledges that a Platonic dialogue is an enigma, but nonetheless attempts to discover something of Plato's thought on the basis of the principle that "Plato himself, as distinguished from his characters, speaks through the surface of the surface of his work".

[5]Cf. C. Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy", for a defence of this assertion. Cf. also S. Rosen, Hermeneutics as Politics, p. 146: "If there is no human nature that remains constant within historical change, and so defines the perspectives of individual readers as perspectives upon a common humanity, then reading is impossible.... [I]nterpretation depends upon the initial accessibility of the sense of the text as independent of clarification and deepening by the subsequent application of theories, methods, and canons."

dialogues, which I shall call the doctrinal and the dramatic or esoteric.[6] The root of the disagreement between these two more or less well-defined schools of thought lies in their evaluation of the dialogue form in which Plato presents his philosophic thought. Supporters of the doctrinal approach, the dominant school of thought in contemporary Plato scholarship,[7] assume that each dialogue represents a relatively straightforward attempt by Plato to convey a philosophic doctrine or doctrines of some kind. They may pause to praise the beauty of the literary ornamentation of the dialogues, or even pay some attention to Plato's characterization of various interlocutors, but they insist that the "poetic" Plato must be set aside as one attempts to discover the (in principle) autonomous doctrines of the "philosophic" Plato.[8] Supporters of the dramatic approach, on the other hand, insist that we begin by acknowledging that Plato wrote dialogues or dramas, not monologues or treatises, and that this itself is of philosophical importance. From this perspective, to assert without a very careful consideration of the dramatic context that a given statement or series of statements by Socrates or any other character in a Platonic dialogue represents Plato's opinion about something is as absurd as to assert without a very careful consideration of the whole drama of Macbeth that according to Shakespeare

---

[6]For a similar formulation, see S. Rosen, Plato's Sophist, p. 1ff.

[7]As S. Rosen notes, despite the fact that its position is under siege from a variety of quarters, the dominant school of professional Plato scholars continues its activities largely unaffected (Plato's Symposium, p. xii). See also E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 25, on this point.

[8]Cf. J. Klein, A Commentary on Plato's Meno, p. 20.

life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.[9]

It is generally acknowledged that the approach which I have termed "doctrinal" and which has come to dominate modern Plato scholarship originated in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[10] Schleiermacher was the first interpreter explicitly to argue against the existence of a hidden or esoteric Platonic teaching.[11] He also initiated the modern attempt to determine the order of composition of Plato's dialogues, and began the first serious effort to detect spurious dialogues in the Platonic corpus as it has come down to us from antiquity.[12] Now, Schleiermacher himself argued that a consistent set of beliefs undergirds all of the genuine Platonic dialogues, and that Plato chose to express his "system" gradually for pedagogic reasons.[13] His successors, while agreeing that Plato had no esoteric teaching and that the order of the dialogues is important, quickly abandoned Schleiermacher's belief in the unity of Plato's thought in favour of what E. N. Tigerstedt terms a "geneticist" account of the Platonic corpus, an

---

[9]See L. Strauss, The City and Man, p. 50 and p. 59, for this example.

[10]See L. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching", p. 67, S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. liv, and T. Pangle, The Roots of Platonic Political Philosophy, p. 5. A. Bowen, "On Interpreting Plato", p. 54 with p. 50, and E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 25, make it clear that the currently dominant school of Platonic scholarship originated as a reaction to Schleiermacher that accepted his basic approach.

[11]F. Schleiermacher, Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato, pp. 9-18.

[12]ibid. pp. 18-47. For a convincing defence of the genuineness of all of the 35 dialogues traditionally ascribed to Plato, see T. Pangle, "Editor's Introduction" to The Roots of Political Philosophy.

[13]F. Schleiermacher, Introductions, pp. 8-9.

account which still dominates scholarship today.[14] Roughly speaking, this is the view that we can determine more or less precisely the order in which Plato wrote his dialogues, "that the chronology of the Platonic dialogues implies a "development" in Plato's own thinking, and that insight into this development contributes in a significant way to the understanding of the dialogues themselves".[15] There are of course many disagreements among adherents of this approach, but in general they seem to accept that Plato began by writing "early" more "Socratic" or "aporetic" dialogues, turned to the exposition of his own doctrines in the "middle" dialogues, finally began more and more to concentrate on explicitly ontological and epistemological themes in the "late" dialogues, and concluded his philosophic career with a burst of (what some commentators take to be) senile authoritarianism in the Laws. Thus proceeding on the basis of what I have termed the "doctrinal" assumption that Plato's intention in each of his dialogues is to convey a fairly straightforward teaching, the geneticists explain any apparent discrepancies between the various dialogues as mirroring a development in Plato's mind, a development that is generally conceived of as a movement away from the thought of Socrates.[16]

Doubtless there is much more to be said about the geneticist approach. For our present purposes, however, it is more important to note that there are a number of ways in which this view of Plato's writings can be persuasively attacked. Most obviously, there is

---

[14]E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 25.

[15]J. Klein, A Commentary on Plato's Meno, p. 9.

[16]See E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 30.

the fact that Plato himself gives us not the slightest indication that he considers the evolution of his philosophic thought a matter of any importance.[17] This is in clear contrast to philosophers like Kant or Nietzsche who do provide us with explicit testimony that their thought as manifested in their published works has evolved.[18] Furthermore, there is a near-total absence of reliable external evidence as to the chronology of the dialogues. This has led scholars to order the dialogues according to "internal" criteria found in the dialogues themselves, which in practice amount to a given scholar's contentions as to what Plato "must have believed" at a certain stage of his development.[19] Again, there is no evidence that these artificially constructed systems correspond to anything that Plato intended to convey through his dialogues. However, surely the strongest indication that the geneticist approach cannot be on the right track is its complete failure to "save the phenomena" of the manifest excellence of Plato's works. As Stanley Rosen notes, the "Plato" whose portrait is painted by this brand of scholarship "seems to vacillate almost from year to year on the most important matters, is so poor a thinker as continuously to be caught up in elementary fallacies, is unable to remember his line of argument for two consecutive pages, and is subject to the most vulgar superstitions of his day."[20] It must be said that a rigorous and consistent geneticist account of the Platonic corpus is congenitally unable to

---

[17]The Seventh Letter provides us with Plato's only acknowledgement of any fundamental change in his thought at any period of his life when he indicates that he had originally planned to enter political life but later turned to philosophy (324b-326b).

[18]S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. lxi.

[19]ibid., p. lxii.

[20]ibid., p. xl.

present him as anything other than a philosophic bungler.[21] For if one makes a serious attempt to resolve all of the contradictions between explicit statements in the dialogues with the hypothesis of an evolution in Plato's thought, one soon notices that not only are there contradictions between, say, "early" and "late" dialogues, there are also contradictions between dialogues that are allegedly in the same stage of evolution, and even - indeed typically - within one dialogue. We seem to be forced to accept a conclusion of Leo Strauss':

> Since Plato refrained from presenting his most important teaching "with all clarity," the prohibition against written expositions of his teaching[22] is self-enforcing: everyone who presents such an exposition becomes, to use a favourite Platonic expression, "ridiculous," inasmuch as he can easily be refuted and confounded by passages in the dialogues which contradict his exposition.[23]

If Plato at any stage of his life did have a consistent philosophic doctrine or system which he intended to communicate as straightforwardly as possible to all readers, then his choice of the dialogue form and the nature of the dialogues themselves betrays a singular incompetence.[24] Yet the first impression that every reader receives from Plato "is not that

---

[21]The "bungler" hypothesis is one from which some have not shrunk; see E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, chapter 3.

[22]Seventh Letter 341c.

[23]"On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy", p. 351.

[24]Cf. S. Rosen, Plato's Sophist, p. 14.

of a fumbler but of an only too nimble manipulator of words and ideas"[25] who, as such, must have been conscious of contradictions that would shame an intelligent high school student.[26] The self-destruction of the geneticist approach to Plato's works seems to demonstrate with particular clarity the truth of E. N. Tigerstedt's assertion that all who read the dialogues in order to extract a fixed doctrine and who do not resort to blatantly a priori interpretations necessarily arrive at an impasse.[27]

Plato himself must have been aware that his dialogues would lead readers searching for some kind of dogma to such an impasse - hence one must presume that this is intentional on his part. Thus, as E. N. Tigerstedt points out, the naive reader's uneasy feeling that Plato is pulling his leg, perhaps even enjoying a joke at his readers' expense, is closer to the truth of the matter than the self-confidence of the vast majority of Plato scholars whose serenity is not troubled by such misgivings.[28] Plato himself has his Socrates indicate that the inhabitants of the cave will be "dazzled" by the light and "in pain" when they are forcibly freed from their shackles and dragged along the upward way.[29] We may presume that Plato is aware of our painful confusion, and that the Platonic dialogues are somehow designed to pull at least some of us out of the cave. But, once we have seen that

---

[25]E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 24.

[26]Cf. L. Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 30.

[27]E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 97.

[28]ibid., p. 94.

[29]Republic 515c-516a.

Plato conceals himself[30] and his opinions in the dialogues, it is very difficult to understand how we can go about using them in such a fashion that Plato pulls us out of the cave. Is there not a very real danger that any attempt to make sense of a Platonic dialogue will simply be the product of the interpreter's own prejudices?[31] Is not any assertion that there exists a concealed or esoteric Platonic doctrine simply an invitation to arbitrary interpretation?[32] And, more concretely, was not the existence of an esoteric Platonic teaching decisively refuted by Schleiermacher?

If we return to Schleiermacher in an attempt to answer these questions, we find that the founder of the modern approach to Plato is actually surprisingly friendlier to the views of "dramatists" or "esotericists" than his reputation might have led one to expect. His arguments against esotericism are in fact in large part directed against the

---

[30]Note that Plato only appears once in his own dialogues, and at that time is an almost silent spectator (Apology of Socrates 38b). The importance of his absence from his own dialogues is emphasized by his expressly noting his own absence from Socrates' execution in his only other mention of himself in the corpus (Phaedo 59b). See L. H. Craig, The War Lover, p. 336 note 21.

[31]S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. lxvii, and E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, p. 11, both use the following quotation of Olympiodorus' Vita Platonis as the epigraph for their books: "Plato himself, too, shortly before his death, had a dream of himself as a swan, darting from tree to tree and causing great trouble to the fowlers, who were unable to catch him. When Simmias the Socratic heard this dream, he explained that all men would endeavour to grasp Plato's meaning; none, however, would succeed, but each would interpret him according to his own views, whether in a metaphysical or physical or any other sense. This is a quality that Plato and Homer have in common: owing to the harmony of their expression they are accessible to everybody, no matter how one wishes to approach them."

[32]Cf. L. Strauss, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing", p. 223.

Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato, which held that Plato's true or esoteric teaching was a series of oral lectures given in the Academy in which he expounded a dogmatic metaphysics, and that the dialogues themselves were merely "exoteric" documents.[33] In the course of his discussion of esotericism, he mentions that there is some truth to the view that Plato had an esoteric teaching "in so far as what is secret and difficult to find out is so only in a relative point of view, and there may always be something obscure and hard to find for some person or other".[34] Near the conclusion of his discussion he asserts the following:

> And thus this would be the only signification in which one could speak of an esoteric and an exoteric, I mean, as indicating only a state of the reader's mind, according as he elevates himself or not to the condition of one truly sensible of the inward spirit [of philosophical learning]; or if it is still to be referred to Plato himself, it can only be said that immediate instruction was his only esoteric process, while writing was his only exoteric.[35]

On the basis of these and other remarks, we are entitled to conclude that for all practical purposes Schleiermacher, the founder of the modern approach to Plato, did believe in the existence of an esoteric teaching contained within the Platonic text itself, and that it was a misunderstanding on the part of his successors that led them to think that he had refuted

---

[33]F. Schleiermacher, Introductions, p. 16. This view has recently been revived in the works of the so-called Tübingen esotericists; see E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, pp. 63-4, and S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. xliii-xlv.

[34]Schleiermacher, Introductions, pp.9-10.

[35]ibid., p. 18.

the existence of all forms of Platonic esotericism.[36]

In the course of his discussion, Schleiermacher asserts that one of the ways in which Plato accomplishes his objective of forcing the reader to think for himself is to write so that

> the real investigation is overdrawn with another, not like a veil, but, as it were, an adhesive skin, which conceals from the inattentive reader, and from him alone, the matter which is to be properly considered or discovered, while it only sharpens the mind of an attentive one to perceive the inward connection.[37]

This last quotation leads us to the decisive point in that everything seems to depend on what we mean by an "attentive reader".[38] Does the beginner (however inadequately and unclearly) understand the same teaching as the expert, or is the road from the extremely inattentive reader to the extremely attentive reader interrupted by a chasm or a "conversion"? Perhaps we should turn to the Republic for guidance on this matter. In terms of the cave analogy, we see that the complete beginner is the man who remains completely shackled and has not even begun to turn his head (515c), while the complete expert is no-one but the full philosopher who has emerged into the light and seen the sun

---

[36]Compare L. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching", pp. 63-4.

[37]F. Schleiermacher, Introductions, p. 18.

[38]For the entire discussion in this paragraph, see L. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching", pp. 67-69, and S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. lv-lvi.

itself (516b). Socrates indicates that the transition from the beginner to the expert is made possible by a "turning around", a "revolution" in the soul of the learner (518c-d). In the Myth of Er, Socrates recounts the tale of a man who, having drawn the first lot in the lottery to choose one's reincarnated life, immediately chose the greatest tyranny. Socrates says of this man that he had "lived in an orderly regime in his former life, participating in virtue by habit, without philosophy" (619c-d). That is to say, the morality of the conventionally virtuous man has a fundamentally different basis from that of the philosopher (cf. 430c). In terms derived from the Republic's "city in speech", the best of the auxiliaries are the beginners, and the beginners must believe "noble lies" (414b-417b). These examples would seem to justify the conclusion that "[t]he difference between the beginner and the philosopher (for the perfectly trained student of Plato is no one else but the genuine philosopher) is a difference not of degree but of kind."[39]

Plato discusses the logic behind this distinction in his own words in the Seventh Letter. He makes the paradoxical claim that there does not exist any writing of his concerning the highest subjects of his philosophy, and goes on to assert that

> if I had thought that these subjects ought to be fully stated in writing or in speech to the public, what nobler action could I have performed in my life than that of writing what is of great benefit to mankind and bringing forth to the light for all men the nature of reality? But were I to undertake this

---

[39]L. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching", p. 68. Compare L. Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli, p. 296.

> task it would not, as I think, prove a good thing for men, save for some few who are able to discover the truth for themselves by means of slight indication; for as to the rest, some it would most unseasonably fill with a mistaken contempt, and others with an overweening and empty aspiration, as though they had learnt some sublime mysteries.[40]

If we combine this statement with the reflections on the Republic in the preceding paragraph, we reach the following result. In writing his dialogues, Plato was conscious of two broad categories of readers, namely those who are philosophic or potentially philosophic, and those who are not. Complicating this picture, however, is the existence of sophists, men who are somehow aware of the superiority of the life of knowledge but who prostitute their knowledge for the sake of honour, wealth or power.[41] This should serve to remind us that the dichotomy between these two classes of readers is an oversimplification. Indeed, a major concern of Plato's rhetoric may be to try to ensure that "in between" men who for some reason do not become philosophers at least do not become vicious.[42] Nevertheless, I believe that the basic distinction between the two broad classes of reader is analytically useful, and corresponds to the two general types of reason for which Plato chose to express himself in dialogue form, namely political considerations and philosophic considerations.

---

[40]Seventh Letter 341d-e.

[41]L. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Philosophy", p. 342.

[42]Compare Republic 491d-e, as well as the end of the Seventh Letter quotation above.

The political aspect of Platonic esotericism has two goals, the protection of society from philosophy and the protection of philosophy from society.[43] The crucial premise of this type of esotericism is the contention that the health and harmony of a society rest on the unqualified commitment of the vast majority of its members to certain fundamental opinions, for example "Democracy [or Monarchy or Aristocracy or whatever] is the best form of government".[44] Plato's acceptance of this view of political life would seem to be indicated by the fact that he has Socrates state that even the inhabitants of the best and most just society imaginable will be required to believe "noble lies".[45] Yet philosophy is characterized above all by the contention that "the unexamined life is not worth living"[46] or by the attempt to replace opinions with knowledge; it is therefore compelled to doubt or even to reject society's cherished opinions. If a philosopher engages in this activity too openly, he may well endanger or appear to endanger the common good by undermining the confidence of society as a whole, and especially of the youth, in the fundamental opinions that sustain that society, and hence provoke the political authorities into persecuting him.[47] Yet even in a situation where he suffers no threat of persecution, a philosopher may decide to censor himself out of a concern to avoid weakening the social

---

[43]On this matter, see L. Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, ch. 2, and L. H. Craig, The War Lover, pp. xviii-xxi.

[44]See L. Strauss, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing", pp. 221-222.

[45]Republic 414b-417b.

[46]Apology of Socrates 38a.

[47]Compare ibid. 33b-c.

fabric. This self-censorship could even extend to strictly private conversations, as the philosopher may well be of the opinion that the destruction of a certain individual's beliefs could serve only to harm that person. Accordingly, there are dialogues in which this problem and its "solution" are made manifest, the Ion being one.

In our time, this line of reasoning seems peculiarly apt to provoke moral indignation or outright disbelief. Yet if we open-mindedly examine our everyday social interactions, we soon note that any intelligent adult who is not completely insensitive to the welfare of others makes at least half-conscious use of those principles of expression, the fully conscious use of which is equivalent to this medicinal philosophic rhetoric.[48] There seems to be no reason why a sufficiently talented and philanthropic author could not transfer this technique to the written word by presenting disturbing speculations or truths "between the lines".[49] The true source of the contemporary disbelief in esotericism is of course the democratic moral belief that all people are equal, and hence equally deserving of being told the truth.[50] Whatever one's view of Plato's aristocratic procedures in this

---

[48]Cf. L. Strauss, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing", p. 224.

[49]For documentary proof that most of the great philosophers in the Western tradition were fully aware of the exoteric-esoteric distinction and modified their writings in accordance with its tenets, see L. H. Craig, The War Lover, pp. 308-323, and L. Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, pp. 27-29. Consider in this light the opinion which Leo Strauss attributes to Lessing that writers on philosophical topics who reject exotericism do not deserve the name of philosophers ("Exoteric Teaching", p. 67).

[50]Nietzsche writes of "[t]he exoteric and the esoteric as philosophers formerly distinguished them, among the Indians as among the Greeks, Persians and Moslems, in short wherever one believed in an order of rank and not in equality and equal rights...." (Beyond Good and Evil, aphorism 30).

matter, "the cause of truth is not served by misinformation about our predecessors."[51] As suggested earlier, self-interest would dictate reading those predecessors in order to have one's beliefs challenged.

This last point leads us to the philosophic aspect of Platonic esotericism. By never speaking in his own words and hence hiding his opinions, Plato forces the reader to philosophize if he is to make sense of the text. The dialogues provide not dogmatic answers to the various important philosophic questions, but rather the means for a diligent and intelligent reader to become fully familiar with all of the nuances of the range of possible answers to such a question. This view of the dialogues' purpose allows us to make sense of Plato's assertion in the Seventh Letter that there does not exist any writing of his concerning the highest subjects of philosophy;[52] the enigmatic and elusive nature of the dialogues allows them to be of assistance to the "few who are able to discover the truth for themselves by means of brief indication" while rendering them essentially silent to the rest.[53] This view of things also sheds light on Socrates' statement in the Phaedrus that no writing deserves to be taken with complete seriousness;[54] Plato playfully seduces his readers into thinking for themselves, following the same road as those who have gone

---

[51]S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. lv.

[52]Seventh Letter 341c.

[53]ibid., 341e. Cf. F. Schleiermacher, Introductions, p. 17.

[54]Phaedrus 277e.

before.[55] As Craig expresses it, Plato:

> wrote nothing that clearly conveys what he thought beyond the thought that philosophy is a worthy way of life for a human being, and that teaching people the important questions effectively promotes this way of life, whereas teaching them sufficient answers tends to foreclose it.[56]

And if Plato's primary purpose in the dialogues is to beget philosophy, it may well be that the dialogue form itself is intrinsic to this purpose.[57] For the dialogues are filled with unphilosophic and antiphilosophic characters who challenge the claim that philosophy is a worthwhile way of life. Socrates' strongest weapon against these assertions seems to be to goad his antiphilosophic interlocutors into philosophizing for themselves. It may well be the case that no "treatise" or set of arguments as such can decide the worth of the philosophic way of life, but only the experience itself. It may thus be vital to Plato's rhetorical purpose that he seduces his best readers into philosophizing for themselves before he encourages them to consider the explicit arguments for and against this way of life.[58]

But does not the assertion that Plato conceals his views lead us back to one of the

---

[55]ibid. 276d.

[56]L. H. Craig, The War Lover, p. xxxvii.

[57]For highly intelligent defences of this view, see C. Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues" and J. Mittelstrass, "On Socratic Dialogue".

[58]Cf. L. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching", p. 69.

problems with which I introduced this section on the dramatic approach to Plato, namely the very real danger of simply arbitrarily reading one's own views into the inherently ambiguous Platonic text?[59] We might begin by noting that there is a sense in which this objection is irrelevant, in that a Platonic text is doing its proper work so long as it provokes serious and self-consciously "ignorant" thought about a genuine philosophic question. But, secondly, the words of the Platonic Socrates himself seem to imply that the opposite is the case. He states that a well-wrought discourse, one manifesting "logographic necessity", "must be organised like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole".[60] This statement would seem to imply that far from licensing an easygoing freedom towards the text, the dramatic and esoteric nature of Plato's works should impose upon us the duty to pay much closer attention to each and every element of that text. As Leo Strauss puts it:

> In a word, one cannot take seriously enough the law of logographic necessity. Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs. Everything which would be accidental outside of the dialogue becomes meaningful within the dialogue. In all actual conversations chance plays a considerable role: all Platonic dialogues are radically fictitious. The Platonic dialogue is based on a

---

[59]See above, p. 9.

[60]Pheadrus 264b-c.

beautiful or beautifying falsehood, viz. on the denial of chance.[61]

The first task of the interpreter is to see in what fashion the teaching conveyed through the dialogue is adapted by the main speaker to his particular audience and circumstances, and to consider how that teaching would have to be restated in order to be valid beyond the particular situation of the conversation in question.[62] This task entails the most painstaking attention to all of the "dramatic" elements of the dialogue[63] such as the time and place, the names and characters of the participants, and (of course) the innumerable kinds of actions in which the participants engage over the course of their discussion. One should also pay particular attention to the title of the dialogue, since this is the only element of the dialogue through which Plato speaks directly in his own words. The interpreter's goal is "to understand the speeches in the light of the deeds [which] means to see how the philosophic treatment of the philosophic theme is modified by the particular or individual or transformed into a rhetorical or poetic treatment or to recover the implicit philosophic treatment from the explicit rhetorical or poetic treatment."[64]

I shall of course have more to say about these literary devices as they bear on the

---

[61]The City and Man, p. 60.

[62]ibid., pp. 54, 60. This is not to deny, of course, that Plato may not agree with even the esoteric teaching of his "main characters"; see L. H. Craig, The War Lover, p. xxxiii and S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. xlvi.

[63]L. Strauss, The City and Man, p. 60. For fuller discussions of these dramatic elements, see L. Strauss, ibid., pp. 55-60 and L. H. Craig, The War Lover, pp. xxvi-xxix.

[64]L. Strauss, The City and Man, p. 60.

Ion in the body of my essay. For now, I would like to close this section of my Introduction by noting that the Ion is a particularly useful dialogue for those interested in reflecting on the problem of esotericism, or the tension between the philosophic life and the non-philosophic life. Apart from Euthyphro and the unphilosophic multitude in the Apology of Socrates, there is probably no interlocutor of Socrates who is as unselfconsciously ignorant and philosophically unpromising as Ion. And whereas in the Apology Socrates seems to go out of his way to provoke the jury by telling them unpalatable truths, in the Ion he seems much more willing to accommodate his interlocutor's point of view, for example by carefully refraining from challenging Ion's (obviously highly questionable) status as an "expert" on Homer, and instead simply attempts to change Ion's understanding of this expertise. We may say, then, that the Ion provides us with a paradigm of Socratic accommodation to the completely non-philosophic individual. Alexandre Kojève describes the Ion as a "completely convincing" scene in which we encounter a man "who believes he is satisfied by what he is and who ceases to be satisfied, solely because he cannot justify this satisfaction in answering Socrates' questions."[65] This passage would seem to imply that all human beings are, to some extent at least, philosophic. Yet Kojève indicates something of the reasons for esotericism in a footnote that he appends to this observation:

> I believe that Plato actually succeeds in convincing those who read and understand his dialogue. But here is the difficulty: the number of people who read Plato is limited; and the number of those who understand him is still more limited. It makes no sense, therefore, to say that the scene in

---

[65] Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, p. 77.

question is "convincing" in general: it can convince, so to speak, only those who are willing to be convinced.[66]

II: INTERPRETING THE ION

I will now turn to some of the scholarship I have found on the Ion. The observations in the previous section may be said to culminate in the demand that the interpreter treat the characters in a Platonic drama as psychologically coherent individuals who can be brought to life by means of the reader's imaginative dialogical interaction with the text. [67] From this perspective, it is only on the basis of a clear understanding of the drama of a dialogue that one can begin to grasp the full meaning of any "doctrine" or line of argument found within the dialogue. What is required is not the suppression of the arguments found in the dialogue, but their meticulous analysis as elements in a coherent dramatic structure.[68] I must say at the outset that all of the scholarship I have been able to find on the Ion is flawed by a failure to take this "dramatic realism" seriously enough. The dialogue is almost unanimously accepted as genuine by contemporary commentators,[69] but on the basis of the supposed "evolution" in Plato's thought which I outlined above, most are apt to dismiss the Ion as hardly more than a piece of Platonic juvenalia, unworthy of detailed discussion. Typical of this attitude is the comment with which A. E. Taylor begins

---

[66]ibid.

[67]Cf. L. Craig, The War Lover, p. xxviii and p. xxxiv.

[68]Cf. S. Rosen, Plato's Sophist, p. 12.

[69]P. Murray, Plato On Poetry, p. 96.

his short discussion of the Ion in Plato: The Man and His Work: "Little need be said about this slight dialogue on the nature of 'poetic inspiration'".[70] The flawed nature of several of Socrates' lines of argument and various questionable aspects of the central myth are taken not as deliberately depicted results of Socrates' accommodation to the nature of his interlocutor, but as reasons for dismissing the Ion out of hand.

One essay which does treat the Ion seriously is Allan Bloom's "An Interpretation of Plato's Ion". This is a valuable piece of scholarship which contains many insightful observations about a variety of dramatic details in the dialogue. Yet it must be acknowledged that even though Bloom was a follower of Leo Strauss, one of the leading "dramatic"-style interpreters, he seems to sidestep the issue with which any "dramatic" interpretation of the Ion must begin, namely: why is the person Socrates talking to the person Ion? And this is despite the fact that he begins his essay by raising this very problem (p. 371)! His essay does include a number of useful speculations on this subject, reflecting the fact that Socrates seems to manifest traces of more than one goal in speaking to Ion.[71] He seems to take the view that Socrates' major purpose in speaking to Ion is to attempt to discover the "master art" or the "art of the whole" (p. 376, 379). Yet he also seems to concede that this is inadequate as an account of Socrates' desire to speak to Ion by repeatedly having recourse to assertions such as the following: "Ion must

---

[70]p. 38. For similarly dismissive scholarship, see F. Schleiermacher, Introductions, pp. 145-151, and P. Shorey, What Plato Said, pp. 96-99.

[71]These include investigating rhapsody's power over the people (pp. 378, 380, 384), and examining Ion's soul (p. 394). I will discuss these partial goals more fully in chapter 2.

represent something beyond himself" (p. 371); the dialogue shows the testing of poetry "symbolically" (p. 375); Socrates compels "us" (i.e. us readers) to see a problem (p. 387); "the Ion is a representation of the emergence of philosophy out of the world of myth" (p. 389) (my emphases). What is common to these assertions is that they implicitly concede that Bloom has failed to explain why the psychologically realistic person named Socrates chooses at the beginning of the dialogue to speak to Ion. If Socrates is indeed seeking a "technical" master art of the whole, Ion represents a particularly poor choice of interlocutor! After all, Socrates does spend about 80% of the dialogue defending the thesis that Ion lacks an art, a conclusion which seems to follow from Ion's admitted inability to "universalize" his interpretive skill (531a, 532bc, 533c). With respect to the manifest inadequacy of the discussion of technai in the "dialectical" sections of the dialogue, Bloom correctly notes that Socrates' principle "one art one subject matter" omits master arts (p. 388). He implies that the reader, upon recognizing the inadequacy of Socrates' arguments, is supposed to discover the existence of master arts for himself. On this basis, we might speculate that Socrates is testing Ion to see if he can produce the required thought for himself, and hence "re-enact" the discovery of (what Bloom considers) the master art of philosophy (p. 388). Yet, of course, Ion doesn't produce the required thought, so in this dialogue, at least, philosophy does not explicitly emerge out of the world of myth (p. 389). As I have already indicated, Bloom claims that this process is perhaps shown only "symbolically". And one may agree that this is so. But it does not suffice as an explanation of the actions of the characters within the drama.

Towards the end of his essay, Bloom includes a long quotation drawn from Xenophon's Memorabilia which he takes to indicate Socrates' demand that men separate their passionate aspirations from their understanding, and act only on the basis of what they understand (pp. 390-1). Yet this same passage implicitly concedes that the cosmos, and hence the human soul within that cosmos, is not completely rational or ordered. If we accept Xenophon's account of Socrates' views on this matter, and further accept Bloom's view that Socrates is seeking to learn something from Ion about "the whole" (as opposed to learning about Ion's soul, or about his "specialized" rhetorical art), is it not more likely that he rather seeks knowledge about precisely the non-rational elements within this whole, or even the non-rational grounds of part or all of our understanding of this whole?[72] Or, to borrow one of Nietzsche's formulations, could Plato here be portraying Socrates having misgivings about (or at least questioning) the limits of reason? Could Socrates be asking himself questions like:

> Perhaps... what is not intelligible to me is not necessarily unintelligent?
>
> Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is exiled?
>
> Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of, and supplement for science?[73]

I shall of course have more to say about this topic in the body of my essay. For now I would simply like to note that in the Apology passage which Bloom uses to support his

---

[72]Compare Phaedrus 244a:"...in reality the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods."

[73]Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, section 14, p. 93.

claim that knowledge must be "technical", Socrates does not actually deny that the inspired poets' poems contain wisdom or an insight into the nature of things, but simply affirms that the poets themselves know nothing of what they speak, and implicitly concedes that "those around" the poets can "speak well" about the poetry (Apology 22a-c).

The remainder of the Ion scholarship may be dealt with more briefly. I was able to find only two further articles dealing with the dialogue's dramatic aspects, Jerrald Ranta's "The Drama of Plato's Ion" and Marie Delcourt's "Socrate, Ion, et la poésie: la structure dialectique de l'Ion de Platon". Ranta makes the interesting argument that Socrates and Ion resemble, respectively, the Ironic man (eiron) and the boaster (alazon) of Attic Old Comedy. His article is certainly a useful contribution to our understanding of the "Aristophanic" aspects of the dialogue, but is flawed by the contention that Plato treats Socrates and Ion as simply character types and not as "real" people (pp. 219, 226). Delcourt, on the other hand, makes the case that Ion is not as imbecilic as he seems, but is simply a man unused to dialectical argumentation who makes several imprudent concessions which Socrates exploits "en parfait sophiste" (p. 5). Ion's ideas on poetry and the art of the rhapsode are incoherent only in form; he simply lacks the ability to express them clearly (p. 4). The flip side of Delcourt's spirited defence of Ion is a marked hostility to Socrates, whom she angrily accuses of arguing "with an astonishing bad faith" (p. 12) and denounces as "a dangerous sophist" (p. 14).

Delcourt's account of Socrates' inability or unwillingness to understand Ion's "poetic intuition" (p. 14) might be said to point towards Nietzsche's account of Socrates in The Birth of Tragedy. According to Nietzsche, when Socrates fixed his "one great Cyclops eye", an eye "denied the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses", onto the "tragic art" he saw only

> [s]omething rather unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects, and effects apparently without causes; the whole, moreover, so motley and manifold that it could not but be repugnant to a sober mind, and a dangerous tinder for sensitive and susceptible souls.[74]

It seems clear to me that in writing his account of the opposition between "the Dionysian and the Socratic", Nietzsche made extensive use of Plato's Ion. One "external" indication of this is the fact that the Ion is the only Platonic dialogue mentioned by name in the course of Nietzsche's book.[75] One might also consider the fact that in his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" which Nietzsche wrote 16 years after The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche terms the book "arrogant and rhapsodic" in the sense that it is disdainful of proof, and designed primarily for "initiates, "music" for those dedicated to music, those who are closely related to begin with on the basis of common and rare aesthetic experiences".[76] At this point someone might object that while Ion may seems "arrogant", he is hardly

---

[74]ibid., section 14, p. 89.

[75]ibid., section 12, p. 83.

[76]ibid., "Attempt at a Self-Criticism", section 3, p. 19.

"rhapsodic" in this sense.[77] But this objection simply leads us to pose the question of why Plato chose to portray the encounter of Socrates with "the Dionysian and tragic", or even "the death of tragedy", in such obviously comic terms. One might consider in this light some of Nietzsche's comments in Beyond Good and Evil (aphorism 30):

> There are heights of the soul from which even tragedy ceases to look tragic; and rolling together all the woe of the world, who could dare to assert that the sight of it would have to seduce and compel us to pity and thus to a redoubling of that woe? ... The virtues of the common man would perhaps signify vice and weakness in a philosopher; it may be possible that if a high type of man degenerated and perished, he would only then acquire qualities that would require those in the lower world into which he had sunk henceforth to worship him like a saint.

Compare this with the end of aphorism 25:

> The martyrdom of the philosopher, his "sacrifice for truth", brings to light what there has been in him of agitator and actor; and if one has hitherto regarded him only with artistic curiosity, in the case of many a philosopher it is easy to understand the desire to see him for once in his degeneration (degenerated into a "martyr", into stage and platform-ranter). But if one does harbour such a desire, one has to be clear what it is one will get to see - merely a satyr play, merely a farcial after-piece, merely a continuing proof

---

[77] A point made by Nietzsche himself in ibid., section 12, p. 83: Ion is a "younger" or even "Euripidean" rhapsodist.

that the long tragedy has come to an end: supposing that every philosophy was in its inception a long tragedy.

In terms of the "doctrinal" versus "dramatic" dichotomy which I outlined in the first part of this Introduction, the rest of the commentaries on the Ion that I have been able to find deal with the dialogue in an essentially "doctrinal" fashion. If one accepts the premises of the "dramatic" approach to Plato, the primary usefulness of such scholarship lies in any assistance it may provide in clarifying the explicit arguments of the dialogue. I therefore see no need to discuss here what I take to be this brand of scholarship's radically flawed accounts of the dialogue as a whole; I will simply refer to particular instances in the body of my essay when they seem to be of some use.

III: THE STRATEGY OF THIS ESSAY

The preceding section of my Introduction is intended to indicate some of my views about the Ion. Yet given the inherently sphinx-like nature of any Platonic dialogue, the reader's sentiment on his first encounter with this particular text should be one of confusion or aporia. Thus my strategy in the body of this essay will be to try to recreate something of the "naive" reader's initial aporetic encounter with the text.[78] As I emphasized at length in the first part of this Introduction, the key to a tentative movement beyond this aporia is a rigorous attention to the drama of the dialogue. Thus the approach

---

[78]This is less difficult than it might sound, since many of the points I raise in chapters 1 and 2 were hypotheses I considered in my initial "struggles" with Plato's text.

I have adopted is intended to mirror the reader's "natural" approach to the dialogue: one reads the dialogue through several times, each time penetrating (I hope) deeper into the dramatic action. This experience is reflected, then, in the sense in which each of my chapters "starts again from the beginning".

Chapter 1 is a retelling of the "story" of the Ion which (1) provides the reader with my understanding of the dialogue's basic structure, as well as (2) drawing attention to certain features of the dialogue which I believe support my eventual conclusion as to the dialogue's purpose, and which I would like the reader to have in mind as I "search" for this purpose in chapter 2.

I begin chapter 2 with the obvious question: "Why does the person named Socrates want to talk to the person named Ion?" After showing how Plato emphasizes the importance of this problem as the starting point for interpretation, I consider dialectically several plausible views and objections to these views, leading to a synthesis near the end of the chapter which states my basic understanding of what is "going on" in the dialogue. Again, I think this chapter mirrors our minds' natural process as we try to understand a Platonic dialogue - having read the dialogue through "fairly well", we "try out" various hypotheses as to its meaning, eventually (one hopes) synthesizing them into a coherent understanding of the dialogue.

Chapter 3 "begins again" with a section by section analysis of the argument and

action of Plato's Ion" (to borrow a formula from Leo Strauss), attempting to show how each image, example and step of the argument coheres with Socrates' overall purpose in the discussion. To anticipate somewhat the results of my "search" in chapter 2 for this purpose, my primary aim in chapter 3 will be to try to show how Socrates' desire for knowledge, particularly his desire for knowledge about "the irrational", combines with his concern to act justly or benefit his interlocutor to determine the course of the conversation.

Before beginning my analysis of the Ion I should take this opportunity to note one very important respect in which my discussion is incomplete. It seems quite likely to me that Plato's dialogue contains an extremely subtle interpretation of Homer's view of "the whole" and of human life within that whole. Anything like a full exploration of this possibility is beyond the scope of this thesis due to the fact that it would require a profound understanding of Homer which I do not possess. Naturally, I include a fair amount of discussion of the dialogue's numerous references to Homer, but my primary aim in this thesis is to try to explore the dialogue "on its own terms" and see what results.

CHAPTER 1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ION

The "outer" structure of the Ion is relatively straightforward. In between a brief prelude and conclusion the dialogue divides naturally into three major parts; each of these three parts can in turn be divided into three subsections. Thus my understanding of the dialogue's structure is as follows:

Prelude: Socrates encounters Ion (530a1-b4).

Part I: The techne of the rhapsode I (530b5-533c3).

(1) Socrates praises Ion's techne (530b5-531a1).

(2) Socrates argues that Ion must be skilled (deinos) in all poets (531a1-532b7).

(3) Socrates argues that Ion does not speak by techne (532b8-533c3).

Part II: The rhapsode's divine inspiration (533c4-536d8).

(1) Socrates' first long speech on divine inspiration (533c4-535a5).

(2) Interlude: Socrates questions Ion on the rhapsode's activities (535a6-535e6).

(3) Socrates' second long speech on divine inspiration (535e7-536d8).

Part III: The techne of the rhapsode II (536d8-541e1).

(1) Socrates argues that each techne knows one thing in Homer (536d8-538d6).

(2) Socrates asks Ion what the rhapsode knows in Homer (538d7-540d3).

(3) Ion asserts that the rhapsode is a general (540d4-541e1).

Conclusion: Ion chooses to be held a divine praiser of Homer, not an unjust expert (technikos) (541e1-542b4).

If we follow the twists and turns (cf. 541e7-8) of the Ion's plot more closely,[1] we see that the dialogue opens somewhat abruptly as the ironically flattering Socrates induces the self-satisfied Ion to stop and talk. After the first four exchanges, which occur entirely at Socrates' initiative, the first of the three major parts begins with a long paragraph of praise by Socrates of Ion's art of rhapsody, emphasizing the rhapsode's role as an interpreter who must understand the meaning of the poet (530b-c). Socrates seems remarkably eager to have a conversation with a man who turns out to be apparently so foolish; it is not clear to what extent the philosopher was aware of Ion's inner emptiness before the dialogue began. In Ion's defence, it should be emphasized that he is acknowledged to be one of the best rhapsodes in Greece; he has just won first prize in a major competition at Epidaurus, and is a strong contender in the great Athenian Panathenaia (530a-b). The conversation continues as Ion, seemingly oblivious to any irony on the philosopher's part, hubristically claims to merit public recognition as the greatest interpreter and adorner of Homer who has ever lived, and offers Socrates a display of his talents (presumably free of charge, no less; cf. 535e) (530c-d). Citing his lack of leisure (cf. Apology of Socrates 31b-c), Socrates gracefully declines such a display, and instead embarks on a series of questions that leads to the conclusion that if Ion is clever (deinos) about Homer then he must be clever about other poets as well (530d-532b). This conclusion is based on Ion's agreement that Homer and the other poets can be examined

---

[1]For discussions of the Ion's structure, see A. Bloom's "An Interpretation of Plato's Ion", pp. 380-1 and p. 385, and K. Dorter's "The Ion: Plato's Characterization of Art", pp. 65-66.

with the same method because (1) they say "the same things" about many matters (531a) and (2) the existence of a common standard of judgement is implicit in Ion's contention that Homer is superior to the other poets (531d-a). Although he may suspect Socrates of making a sophistical display of his proficiency at refutation (532d; see also Republic 336c, 338d), Ion seems also to be genuinely perplexed, asking his first question: Why does he pay attention to discussions of Homer, but doze off if someone discusses another poet (532b-c)? Directly contradicting his earlier extravagant praise of Ion's art (530b-c), Socrates now argues at length that Ion does not speak about Homer by art (532c-533c). The philosopher seems in fact to be aware from the beginning of their conversation of the fact that Ion is "skilled" only in the recitation of Homer (cf. 530b9-10) and to try to push Ion into providing an explanation of this phenomenon.

Ion, however, can offer no such explanation, but simply repeats that he speaks most finely of all human beings about Homer but cannot speak at all about other poets (533c). Despite the fact that he continues to assert his supremacy in the field of speaking about Homer, Ion has been rendered sufficiently uncomfortable by Socrates' line of questioning that he makes a further plea for an explanation of his way of life (533c). This opens the second major part of the dialogue as Socrates embarks on a long exposition of the fact that in his role as rhapsode Ion speaks not by art but by divine inspiration (533c-535a). In the dialogue's most memorable image, he compares the poetic muse to a magnet which directly seizes certain rings (the poets), and allows these rings in their turn to seize others (533d-e). Upon Ion's confessing that Socrates' speech "lays hold of his soul"

(535a), Socrates, in the centre of the central part of the dialogue, questions Ion about the rhapsode's ability to produce epic emotions in himself and his audience (535a-e). When Ion, the teller of magnificent tales about larger-than-life heroes such as Odysseus, Achilles and Hector (535b-c) reveals an all-too-common mercenary nature lurking underneath it all (535e), Socrates does not respond directly, but instead launches into a revised version of the myth of the magnet, indicating that Ion is no different from his audience in terms of divine possession (535e-536d). Ion, however, does not find this less flattering account of his power completely adequate. In particular, it doesn't explain his ability to praise Homer, and he again offers Socrates a display of this aspect of his skill (536d).

Socrates again gracefully refuses and instead launches the third major section of the dialogue by asking Ion another question: About which one of the things of which Homer speaks does Ion speak well (536de)? Ion responds that he speaks well about all things of which Homer speaks (536e). Socrates rather sophistically disarms this objection by citing various passages from Homer which involve arts, and getting Ion to agree that in each case the possessor of the relevant art would be better able than Ion to judge whether Homer speaks rightly or finely (537a-d, 538b-d). Despite his inability to respond to Socrates' arguments, Ion sticks to his guns and continues to assert that the rhapsode will know "all things" in Homer (539e), but is finally persuaded on the basis of the fact that the rhapsode will know what is appropriate for a general to say when exhorting his troops to argue that the art of rhapsody is equivalent to the art of generalship (540d-541a). Relieved of his uncomfortable aporia, and pleased to be able to claim to know something again, Ion

demonstrates that his vanity remains fully intact by claiming to be Greece's greatest general, and that he learned this skill from Homer (541b). While indulging Ion in this mode (540d-541b), Socrates asks Ion why he goes around Greece as a rhapsode rather than a general, apparently defending the notion that Ion could be appointed as a general since the Athenians have appointed certain foreigners before now (541b-e).

In the midst of this speech, or perhaps after a long pause in which Ion has nothing to say (541e1; cf. 533c), Socrates suddenly changes both the tone and subject of his speech, beginning the conclusion of the dialogue (541e-542b). For the first time in the dialogue, he now speaks in overtly political and accusatory terms, alleging that if Ion can speak about Homer by art, then he is unjust[2], since Proteus-like he twists and turns into all sorts of shapes rather than keep his promise and display his wisdom about Homer. Continuing to play the role of the accusatory city, Socrates offers Ion an obviously weighted choice: does he want to be held "by us (Athenians?)" to be an unjust man who, possessing an art, breaks his promise to speak about Homer, or a divine one, who, knowing nothing, speaks about Homer by divine dispensation (542a)? On the basis of Ion's rather tentative assertion that there is a great difference between the two options, and that "to be held to be divine is far finer", Socrates concludes that Ion must have chosen to

---

[2]The only previous use of any word related to adikein ("to do injustice") is at 535d5 in the interlude between Socrates' two long speeches, where Socrates says that the rhapsode must be out of his mind to be frightened when standing before twenty thousand friendly human beings, with no-one stripping (for battle) or doing injustice to him (adikountos). (Bloom misleadingly translates adikountos as "harming him".) No words related to dikein ("to do justice" in a positive sense) are used in the dialogue.

be divine and states that he may have this "from us" (542b).

CHAPTER 2: THE PROBLEM OF THE ION

What is the reader to make of this drama? The first, the most superficial[1] question that one can ask about the Ion is: "Why is Socrates talking to Ion?" This question is amenable to two distinct (although not mutually exclusive) interpretations. It can mean either (1) "What is the motive of the character named Socrates for talking to the character named Ion?" or (2) "What is Plato's motive in presenting this conversation?" If one takes seriously the fact that the Ion is a drama, it is clear that any attempt to provide an answer to the second question must be based upon a serious endeavour to answer the first. (This does not, of course, preclude one from addressing these interrelated questions dialogically, i.e. with one's speculations regarding one question enhancing one's speculations about the other.) This means that in attempting to extract Plato's teaching from the Ion, one must be aware that all statements within the dialogue are made by particular individuals, constrained by their own psychological limitations and those of their interlocutors. As Stanley Rosen puts it:

> The opinions of the protagonists [of a Platonic dialogue] are either sick or healthy, which is to be determined by mutual consultation between doctor and patient. Just as in contemporary psychodrama the patients act out their ailments, so the Platonic dialogues show men of various kinds acting out

---

[1]Cf. a remark by L. Strauss: "The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things" (Thoughts on Machiavelli, p. 13). S. Rosen cites this remark in his Hermeneutics as Politics and adds: "The surface in the case of the Platonic dialogue is the connection between hermeneutics and politics" (p. 88).

the consequences of the disease of ignorance.[2]

As Rosen's comments indicate, this "consultation" takes place at two levels, corresponding to the two meanings of the question "Why is Socrates talking to Ion?": (1) Why (and how) is "Dr. Socrates" treating Ion? (2) Why (and how) is "Dr. Plato" treating us, his readers, by presenting us with this dramatic acting out of the ailment of ignorance by Ion (and possibly even by Socrates, as Rosen suggests)? To repeat, however: I believe that we cannot begin to understand Plato's treatment of us until we have made significant progress in understanding Socrates' treatment of Ion.

So, we ask, "Why does Socrates talk to Ion?" And, when we begin looking for an answer to this question, we notice that it seems as if Plato has gone out of his way to emphasize that this is the puzzling, paradoxical question with which any serious study of the Ion must begin. One obvious way in which Plato accomplishes this is through his choice of title. Plato could have named the dialogue after anything or anyone he wanted, but he chose to name it Ion, leading the reader to expect that something about Ion's nature will be on display in the dialogue, or that (given that Socrates is a character in the dialogue) Socrates' characteristic way of "treating" (in both senses of the term) Ion (and hence other men of his psychological "type") will be on display.

The first words of the dialogue also point to the problem: ton Iona chairein ("Ion, greetings"). As Penelope Murray puts it: "The first two words neatly constitute the title of

---

[2]S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, p. xlix.

the dialogue",[3] or rather, they reemphasise the title. There is precedent for treating the first word or few words of Plato's dialogues as revealing about the content of the dialogue. For example, the Apology of Socrates begins hoti men humeis, o andres Athenaioi ("how you (emphatic), o men of Athens"), while the work as a whole "gives an account of Socrates' whole life, of his whole way of life, to the largest multitude, to the authoritative multitude",[4] i.e. to these men of Athens who are in the fullest sense the "you" against whom the philosophic "I" Socrates stands. One can also consider also the opening word of the Republic in this respect: kateben ("Down I went"); the Republic depicts a descent by Socrates into the cave of political life for some purpose or purposes we are left to discover.

However the most obvious way in which Plato creates this puzzlement about "Why does Socrates choose to speak to Ion?" in his readers is through his carefully-drawn character portrait of Ion himself. When we first meet him, Ion is smugly confident of his self-sufficiency (cf. 531a3-4), feeling no need to take any sort of initiative in his conversation with Socrates (530a-b). When he is finally induced to talk by Socrates' extravagant flattery, he quickly reveals himself to be ludicrously vain, accepting Socrates' repeatedly professed envy as no more than his due (530b, c), and quickly adding that no-one else who has ever lived has ever had so many fine thoughts about Homer as he, and that for his merits he deserves to be crowned with a golden crown by the Homeridae

---

[3]Plato on Poetry's line by line commentary on the Ion, p. 99.

[4]L. Strauss, "On Plato's Apology of Socrates and Crito", p. 38.

(530d). Now, I have already indicated that Ion is a very skilled rhapsode. From the point of view of the philosophic demand for "reason giving", however, the emptiness of his boasts is quickly revealed when he is pressed to specify the difference between Homer and other poets and can only sputter that Homer is "better indeed, by Zeus!" (531d). It seems clear that he simply takes Homer's preeminence for granted and then uses the prestige attached to Homer's name to bolster his own status. To his credit, he is somewhat perplexed by certain of Socrates' refutations (532bc, 533c), but his perplexity never extends to doubting that he speaks "most finely of all human beings about Homer" (533c) and is the best rhapsode among the Greeks (541b). The true source of his excessive self-esteem is revealed in his repeated satisfied references to his popularity (530b, 533b, 535d-e). At the centre of the dialogue, he reveals that his ability to "lose himself" in Homer's noble tales of epic struggles coexists in his soul with a rather prosaic and bourgeois attachment to wealth (535a-e). He reaches the height of ludicrousness near the end of the dialogue when - in the midst of the Peloponnesian war, with Alcibiades, Demosthenes, Brasidas, Lysander and so forth as competition (either alive or very recently dead) - he claims to be the greatest general in Greece, and to have learned this from Homer (541b-c).

Now, it's evident to even a superficial reader of the dialogue that Ion suffers from a profound and perhaps incorrigible case of ignorance, as well as numerous other (possibly related) vices of soul, vanity and an excessive attachment to wealth being the most obvious. But this only makes "Dr. Socrates'" actions more perplexing. Ordinary doctors may be repelled by the ailments of their patients, but, like Socrates' hypothetical

possessors of the art of rule "in the precise sense" of Republic Book I, provide treatment for the sake of the wages they receive: "either money, or honor, or a penalty" if they do not provide treatment (Republic 347a; cf. 346b). However, Socrates manifests no interest in receiving either money or honour for his treatment of Ion, and given that the conversation takes place entirely at Socrates' initiative one is hard pressed to think of any penalty he might suffer for failing to cure the rhapsode. Thus one asks: Why would Socrates choose to be with, much less try to palliate or even cure, what seems to be such an incorrigibly diseased because weak and shallow soul?

One possibility is that Socrates is motivated to treat Ion by an end which he doesn't explicitly cite as a possible reason to choose to rule voluntarily in Republic Book I, namely knowledge. That is, in the course of treating Ion, Socrates may learn something from him or about him. (It's hard to imagine someone claiming to know the art of medicine if he has never treated any patients, i.e. put his theoretical knowledge into practice.) In light of this possibility, we should consider that Socrates' motives for beginning the conversation may not be the same as those for which he continues it once it has begun, and thus has learnt more about Ion. So, we are probably well-advised to begin at the beginning, and first ask what motivates Socrates to begin the dialogue by stopping Ion and engaging him in conversation. Given the entirely voluntary nature of this beginning on Socrates' part, it is difficult to see what, besides hoping to learn something or other from Ion, could be motivating Socrates at this point. The two are obviously acquainted, since they know one another's names without being introduced. We may speculate that they have had at least a

few words of polite conversation before. As his flattering first speech shows, Socrates is also reasonably well-informed about the details of Ion's rhapsodic activity (530b-c, 535d); he knows Ion's character well enough to "seduce" him to talk with a speech that begins by emphasizing the rhapsode's beautiful appearance (530b-c). It is clear that Socrates is not under any illusions that Ion is a man of immense merit, although he may not be aware of just how little the rhapsode is able to understand or defend his own activity.

Socrates' first speech does explicitly indicate one reason why Socrates might want to talk to Ion: he hopes to learn from him about the interpretation of Homer. In the course of his first speech, Socrates states no less than three times that the rhapsode must understand the thought of the poet, not just parrot his words (530b10-c1, c2-3, c5). Does he make this statement in order to see what Ion comes up with in response? Certainly "Ion as interpreter of Homer" remains a theme of Socrates' throughout the dialogue, culminating in Socrates' final (ironic) accusation of Ion that if the rhapsode has knowledge of Homer, he is unjust since he refuses to share it with Socrates (541e-542a). Perhaps Socrates has witnessed one or more of Ion's performances, and concluded on the basis of Ion's skill at bringing the poetry to life in his spectators' imaginations that the rhapsode must know <u>something</u> about the inner content of Homer's poetry in order to be so successful at producing this effect. Socrates' questions would then be designed to try to discover what, if anything, this "something" is. The case is somewhat analogous to someone who wishes to interpret a Shakespearean play having the opportunity to discuss the play with a really first-rate Shakespearean actor or director. One probably wouldn't

expect these people to have as deep an understanding of the political and philosophical issues raised by the play as a really insightful scholar, but one would expect that they could contribute something to one's understanding of the play. For example, someone who wished to understand Macbeth's psyche as he was deciding whether or not to murder Duncan might benefit from a conversation with an actor skilled in bringing the character of Macbeth "to life". Similarly, it is repeatedly made clear that whatever his other flaws of soul, Ion is skilled at making Homeric characters such as Odysseus, Achilles and Hector (535b-c) live in his audiences' imagination. He has just won first prize at a major rhapsodic festival in Epidaurus, and is apparently a strong contender in the upcoming Panathenaia (530a-b). His claims to be by far the best rhapsode in Greece (530c-d, 541b) may be exaggerated, but when he says that "everyone else" affirms that he speaks well about Homer, this cannot be a complete falsehood (533c).

That Socrates may have hoped to learn something about the interpretation of Homer from Ion is also hinted at by another source, the Apology of Socrates. There Socrates states that when he questioned the poets about the meaning of their poetry, he made the following discovery:

> Almost everyone present, so to speak, would have spoken better than the poets did about the poetry that they themselves had made. So again, also concerning the poets, I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired (enthousiazontes), like the diviners and those who deliver oracles. For they

too say many noble things, but know nothing of what they speak. (22b-c).

This account of the poets' wisdom is obviously very close to that provided in Socrates' two long speeches in the central part of the Ion (see especially 534a-b). But it also leaves open the possibility that "those present" can provide a more rational account of the meaning of the poets' creations. Is this the possibility that Socrates investigates at the beginning of Ion, only to conclude that Ion, at any rate, is just as dependent on some sort of mysterious "inspiration" as the poets themselves (542b)?

This last statement leads to a second possible reason why Socrates might choose to speak to Ion, namely an interest in "the irrational" as such. I have already cited some of the questions which Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy indicates Socrates could be asking himself concerning the possibility of a non-rational kind of wisdom.[5] Now, at one point Nietzsche says that we see the heart of the Socratic tendency in his condemnation of celebrated Athenians because they practice their activities "only by instinct" and cannot rationally justify their actions.[6] However, he later raises the possibility of an "artistic Socrates" or a "Socrates who practices music" who recognizes art as "a necessary correlative of, and supplement for science."[7] In the course of his discussion he includes the following remark:

---

[5]See above, p. 24.

[6]The Birth of Tragedy, section 13, p. 87. Compare the Apology of Socrates quotation in my previous paragraph.

[7]ibid., section 14, p. 92, section 15, p. 98, section 14, p. 93.

> If we must thus assume an anti-Dionysian tendency operating even prior to Socrates, which merely received in him an unprecedentedly magnificent expression, we must not draw back before the question of what such a phenomenon as that of Socrates indicates; for in view of the Platonic dialogues we are certainly not entitled to regard it as merely a disintegrating, negative force.[8]

In light of these remarks, we may consider the possibility that the Ion can be regarded as an attempt by Socrates both (1) to learn about "Dionysian" wisdom, and (2) to put his own version of this "instinctive" wisdom into practice. With respect to the first point, Ion's faults from a "rationalistic" point of view could very well be virtues (of a kind) from the point of view of one seeking to learn about the Dionysian. That is, it is Ion's unreflective "emptiness", his naïveté, that allows him to function as such an effective "conduit" to impart tragic emotion into the spectators.[9] On this view of things, Socrates' attack in the first part of the dialogue on Ion's claim to possess an art would be designed to test whether or not Ion has anything approaching a rational account of his "instinctive" activity. That is, Socrates does not so much condemn the celebrated semi-Athenian (cf. 541d6) Ion's practising his activity by instinct, as try to understand how that instinct "works". But it seems to be true of virtually all human beings that if they are questioned about something, and take the question seriously (so that it becomes a genuine question

---

[8]ibid., section 14, p. 92.

[9]This is a clear implication of the "myth of the magnet" which I will discuss further in chapter 3.

for them), then they are necessarily "dissatisfied" if they cannot provide what seems like a sufficient answer to that question, and, as such, they lose confidence in their "instincts".[10] This means that because Socrates' investigation of an "instinctive" man must necessarily take the form of attempting to goad him into providing a logos of his activity, or at least semiconsciously providing "material" with which Socrates can construct such a logos, Socrates' investigations necessarily have an instinct-degenerating effect (on those who are not at least potentially philosophic, at any rate), which would seem to make Ion worse, not better; hence he must be "restored" by the end of the dialogue.

This problem provides an opportunity for Socrates in the second part of the Ion to engage in his own type of poetic activity in the creation of an account of Ion's activity that is rhetorically well-suited to Ion's nature. Ion indicates that Socrates' myth lays hold of his soul, presumably in a fashion similar to that in which the various members of the chain in the myth of the magnet are possessed (535a, 533e). This, I take it, is one of the senses in which we are entitled to conclude on the basis of the Platonic dialogues that the Socratic phenomenon is not merely "a disintegrating, negative force". (Another sense in which this is so is, of course, Plato's creative activity in writing his dialogues, which might be regarded as infinitely enhanced Socratic myths). I will deal with the question of the extent to which Socrates' providing this poetic account of Ion's activity can be seen as a just act later in this chapter. Here I would simply note that Socrates revives Ion's instincts with the

---

[10]Compare the remarks by A. Kojève with which I concluded the first part of my Introduction. (See above, pp. 20-21).

first version of the magnet myth (533c-535a), only to renew his questioning again immediately after this (535a-e). Only upon Ion's revealing an excessive concern with wealth underneath it all (535e) does Socrates provide the second myth, and spend the rest of the dialogue defending it. As Allan Bloom notes,[11] this second myth is distinctly less flattering than the first, in that it no longer portrays divine possession as a special title to wisdom; all of the participants, including the members of the audience, are "divinely possessed" on this new account. By encouraging Ion to see himself as "at one" with the "divine frenzy" of his audience, the second version of the myth seems designed to reduce Ion's mercenary tendencies.

But the contention that Ion is to a large extent motivated by money in his rhapsodic activity leads us to the third possible reason for Socrates' choosing to speak to Ion, namely his possible interest in Ion's rhapsody not as a "gift of the gods" but as an instance of the (potentially) rational art of rhetoric. I have already indicated that Ion <u>is</u> a skilled rhapsode, and Socrates notes that this means that he is skilled at creating powerful emotions in his audience in response to imaginary tales (535d). The human capacity to respond emotionally to imagined events presented in writing, in speech, or dramatically is a perplexing feature of our psychology, and it is only natural that someone interested in the human psyche would be curious about "the man behind the magic". And the fact that the rhapsode turns out to be such an apparent "nonentity" only makes his skill more interesting and perplexing. The ability to produce effects surely implies knowledge of

---

[11] "An Interpretation of Plato's <u>Ion</u>", p. 384.

some kind. Perhaps Socrates hopes to learn more about a potential rhapsodic techne by presenting his long speech about poetic inspiration (533c-534e) and seeing how Ion responds. On this account, Socrates' questions about Ion's status as an interpreter of Homer would be designed to make Ion receptive to Socrates' "divine" account of Ion's rhapsodic skill, and Socrates' "real" questioning begins following his presentation of this account (535aff). Socrates' second speech about Ion's divine inspiration, following the rhapsode's revelation of his quite prosaic love of lucre (535e), would then be designed to try to lessen Ion's attachment to wealth to an extent. Given the course of the conversation after that point, however, it does seem clear that learning about Ion's rhapsodic skill cannot have been Socrates' sole motivation for initiating the conversation, although it may have played a part.

A fourth possibility is that Socrates is curious about Ion's type of soul. He is clearly well enough acquainted with Ion to flatter him very adeptly in his first long speech (530b-c), but he may wish to "fill in the details" on his map of the topography of the human psyche. Certainly the course of the conversation provides the reader with a very interesting portrait of Ion's character "type", and it is possible that even the master psychologist Socrates learns something too. I have already indicated some of the major features of Ion's psyche, which Allan Bloom summarizes by stating that Ion "is, in the deepest sense, an actor".[12] The rhapsode's strange (although not all that unusual) combination of dependence upon the opinion of others for his sense of self-worth and

---

[12]ibid., p. 383.

somewhat mercenary hope to profit at the expense of these same others[13] is best summarized by his hilarious statement near the centre of the dialogue that if he sees his audience crying, he laughs because of the money he is making, but if he sees them laughing, he cries because of the money he is losing; his friendly (535d5) admirers are at the same time in some sense his adversaries. Socrates may be amusing himself as well as learning about the human soul by seeing just how far he can "push" Ion by dialectically undermining his claims to knowledge. If this is what Socrates is up to, then the process clearly culminates in Ion's ridiculous claim at the end of the dialogue that he is the greatest general in Greece (540d-541e).

I have suggested four reasons why Socrates decides at the beginning of the dialogue to engage Ion in conversation, namely (1) he hopes to learn about the interpretation of Homer, (2) he hopes to learn about the "irrational", (3) he hopes to learn about the rhapsodic skill and its power over the human soul, and (4) he hopes to learn about Ion's type of soul. None of these possibilities necessarily excludes the other three; indeed, it seems clear that Socrates manifests traces of all four concerns over the course of the dialogue. However, it also seems clear that even taken together, they do not sufficiently explain "the argument and action of Plato's Ion". This means that although Socrates may initiate the conversation in the hope of learning about one or more of these topics, a desire for knowledge does not completely explain the course of the conversation

---

[13]Another character who manifests these conflicting tendencies is Thrasymachus, who blushes when they are exposed by Socrates (Republic 350d).

once it has begun.

In my discussion of Socrates' desire to learn about "the irrational", I suggested that Socrates' actions throughout the dialogue may be motivated by justice as well as by a desire for knowledge. That is, being concerned to "benefit friends and harm no-one",[14] Socrates is careful to ensure that any "destructive" effects of his probings of Ion's unselfconscious (or, in Nietzsche's term, "instinctive") views are counteracted by the "constructive" myths (or "noble lies") which he crafts in order to provide Ion with a "healthy" (although at best only partially true) understanding of himself and the worth of his own activity. Despite the fact that Ion cannot begin to provide a philosophically satisfactory explanation of his way of life or of his beliefs, Socrates does not simply destroy the basis of Ion's self-esteem while offering nothing in its place. In the Apology Socrates indicates that he is aware that this is one of the charges against him. Responding to his own question as to why certain young men enjoy spending time with him, Socrates replies:

> It is because they enjoy hearing men examined who suppose they are wise but are not. For it is not unpleasant. (33c).

That is (Socrates' accusers would say), he attracts crowds of sniggering youths who enjoy seeing their elders and betters confounded by subtle sophistical tricks. And upon learning that Socrates is speaking privately to Ion, such accusers might expect that Socrates would still engage in such destructive cross-examination, although purely for his own

---

[14]Compare Republic 335b-d.

amusement. When pressed in the argument, Ion himself may suggest that this is the case by commenting, "I take pleasure in listening to you wise men (sophon)" (532d). Whatever else the dialogue may accomplish, it also provides a Platonic defence of Socrates against these charges by showing that his mode of interaction with Ion is quite otherwise.

But let us return to the dialogue for guidance as to Socrates' justice or injustice. Words related to adikein ("to do injustice") occur a total of five times in the dialogue; words related to dikein ("to do justice", the opposite of adikein) do not occur at all. Of the five uses of words related to adikein, the first occurs in the central section of part II, when Socrates asks Ion if a rhapsode is in his right mind when he is "frightened while standing before twenty thousand friendly human beings, although no one is stripping or doing injustice to him (adikountos)" (535d). The other four uses, however, are all located in the conclusion, in the course of Socrates accusing Ion of injustice. Socrates presents him with a simple, not to say weighted choice: either the rhapsode can speak about Homer by art and knowledge, in which case Ion is unjust, or else he speaks about Homer by divine dispensation and without knowledge, in which case he himself is divine (541e-542a). Confronted with these alternatives, Ion chooses to be held divine, since this is "far finer (polu... kallion)"(542b).

And once we notice that the dialogue ends with Ion's choosing to be held divine, can we not see that, in addition to any other concerns which Socrates may have, the philosopher's entire argument in the dialogue has been designed to convince Ion to make

this choice? That is, for some reason Socrates restricts Ion's choices to (1) possession of an art or (2) divine inspiration, and essentially forces Ion to choose divinity by undermining any claim he has to any art. If Socrates' goal from the outset, or at least from the moment when he realizes that Ion cannot provide anything like a satisfactory explanation of his life, is to convince Ion of his "divinity" (thus curing him of the illusion that he is a "knower"), do not "the argument and action" of the dialogue become considerably clearer? Socrates begins by seducing Ion into talking with him by ironically flattering the rhapsode's art (530a-d). He then asks Ion whether he is clever about other poets as well, knowing that Ion will reply "no" while the argument will lead to the result that any possessor of an art of rhapsody should reply "yes" (531a-532b). Ion's inevitable perplexity then provides the philosopher with the opportunity to argue against his earlier position that Ion possesses an art (532b-533c). Ion then naturally asks how he is able to rhapsodize so well, providing Socrates with the opportunity to expound the "myth of the magnet" and his other arguments in favour of the rhapsode's divine inspiration (533c-536d). When Ion rejects the second version of Socrates' account of the rhapsode's divine possession, however, Socrates is back to square one (536d). The philosopher again assumes that Ion is laying claim to the possession of an art as the only possible alternative explanation of his ability to recite and interpret (538b4), and by means of the questionable assumption that something known by one art cannot be known by any other art or in any other way, finally succeeds in convincing Ion to make the absurd claim that the art of rhapsody is equivalent to the art of the general (535a-541b). Even Ion cannot maintain this thesis in the face of Socrates' ironic questions (541c) and examples (541c-d), and so the

rhapsode finally "surrenders" and agrees that he is divine rather than a possessor of an art and unjust (541e-b).

Thus my thesis is that throughout the dialogue Socrates is able subtly to balance (1) his desire for the various kinds of knowledge which I outlined above and (2) his desire to benefit or act justly toward Ion, which amounts to his endeavouring to convince Ion to accept the "divine" account of his activities. The question that naturally arises at this point is how the myth of the magnet and the other myths which Socrates relates are peculiarly suited to benefit Ion.

The first aspect of Socrates' justice is the question of his treatment of Ion as an individual. Now, it seems clear that Ion's greatest vice of soul is an excessive vanity which is coupled with and based upon his unselfconscious ignorance. We note that Socrates' attribution of divine inspiration to Ion is still quite flattering, and hence takes account of the impossibility of eliminating the rhapsode's vanity completely, leaving him something to "cling" to; yet by virtue of the fact that the myths give Socrates free rein to destroy any claims to knowledge on the rhapsode's part, and make his "talents" entirely a result of divine gifts as opposed to his own efforts, the "divine" account is effective in at least reducing the rhapsode's vanity.

In this connection, we might note that in the central "myth of the magnet", Socrates speaks of "the Stone which Euripides named Magnesian but which the many call

Heraclean" (533d). This implies that there are two possible types of explanation of rhapsody's power, namely a popular, religious account and a naturalistic, more philosophic (or pseudo-philosophic) explanation. At the beginning of the dialogue, we receive some indication that Ion is familiar with the latter kind of thought in his mention of several Homeric interpreters who apparently understood the various deities in Homer's poems as allegorical representations of natural phenomena.[15] It seems clear that such naturalistic accounts of the Homeric teaching cannot serve any of the political purposes advanced by the religious account. Socrates' myths seem clearly designed to steer Ion away from such naturalistic accounts and towards a wholehearted acceptance of the traditional religious view of poetry (or at least a reasonable approximation of this view). That is, although Ion gives no indication of any real understanding of the possibility of a philosophic view of Homer or of the world in general, the "instinctive" or unreflective basis of all of the opinions that allow him to function healthily and happily renders him vulnerable to a philosophic or sophistical "deconstruction" of his views, with a very real danger, of course, that these views cannot be replaced by something better. Indeed, although Ion of course hasn't really reflected on this process, the revelation at the centre of the dialogue of his excessive attachment to money might indicate that this destruction of his religious views is beginning to take place (535e). For, strange to say, it seems as if there is a correlation in many ordinary people's souls between a belief in a "materialistic" universe and "materialism" in the more usual sense of the term, that is, an excessive concern with

---

[15]530d with Bloom's note 4 on this passage.

the accumulation of money and material goods.[16] That is, popular "enlightenment" as to the (allegedly) "material" nature of the universe (and the corresponding absence of gods who reward justice and punish injustice) may encourage more talented and ambitious individuals to become tyrants or some other form of criminal, but most ordinary, rather weak people seem simply to become (at best) bourgeois or (at worst) completely weakened by vices of some kind, (almost inevitably having to do with various forms of physical pleasure). Speaking of the adherents of the "good old times" in late fifth-century Athens (most notably Aristophanes), Nietzsche says that

> [t]o the influence of Socrates and Euripides they attributed the fact that the old Marathonian stalwart fitness of body and soul was being sacrificed more and more to a dubious enlightenment that involved the progressive degeneration of the powers of body and soul.[17]

And, of course, we receive a clear indication of Ion's vulnerability to this kind of degeneration in the ease with which Socrates in the first part of the dialogue undermines his claims to knowledge. To this it might be countered that Ion's vanity seems to remain almost completely intact at the end of this section in that while admitting he has nothing to say in response to Socrates' questions, he continues to claim that he speaks most finely of all human beings <u>about</u> Homer (533b). Yet we should note that while Socrates is eventually able to undermine the rhapsode's status as an interpreter of Homer, he

---

[16]This psychological insight seems to be a key element in the strategy of Thomas Hobbes' political science.

[17]<u>The Birth of Tragedy</u>, section 13, p. 86.

nonetheless leaves Ion with a firm belief in his proficiency as a reciter of Homer. We are at least left to wonder what effect an all-out attack by a completely unscrupulous sophist on everything about Ion's way of life would have had on Ion's soul.

The second aspect of Socrates' justice is the question of his benefiting the city of Athens as a whole through his interrogation of Ion. We might begin our investigation of this topic by again emphasizing that Ion is a very successful rhapsode. This implies that he is an "opinion shaper" of sorts, if not exactly a "leader", especially among the demos, the people as a whole. (Socrates speaks of Ion performing before twenty thousand human beings (535d; cf. 533c, 536b4-5)). Now, Ion clearly performs the kind of emotionally-charged poetry that Socrates and the austere Adeimantus banish from their "city in speech" in Republic Books II and III. Socrates says of such a man:

> Now, as it seems, if a man who is able by wisdom to become every sort of thing and to imitate all things should come to our city, wishing to make a display of himself and his poems, we would fall on our knees before such a man as sacred, wonderful, and pleasing; but we would say that there is no such man among us in the city nor is it lawful for such a man to be born there. We would send him to another city, with myrrh poured over his head and crowned with wool, while we ourselves would use a more austere and less pleasing poet and teller of tales for the sake of benefit, one who would imitate the style of the decent man and would say what he says in those models that we set down as laws at the beginning, when we undertook to

educate the soldiers. (398a-b).

This passage has many resonances for the student of the Ion. In the course of his accusing the rhapsode of injustice in the dialogue's conclusion, Socrates explicitly compares Ion to Proteus, who had this power "to become every sort of thing and to imitate all things" (541e). The poets whose poetry Ion recites are referred to as "sacred", and as "culling their songs from certain fountains flowing with honey", i.e. as pleasing (534a-b). The reference to "crowning" the banished poet is also interesting, since Ion is repeatedly referred to as crowned or potentially crowned, although with a luxurious golden crown rather than the "city in speech"'s austere wool (530d, 535d, 541c). In presenting Ion with his choice at the end of the dialogue, Socrates asks the rhapsode whether he wants "to be held (nomizesthai) by us to be an unjust man or a divine one" (542a). The word nomizesthai comes from the same root as nomos, "law"; Socrates is essentially asking Ion whether he wants the community's laws to judge him unjust or divine (cf. also 542b).

But this last point leads us to the essential difference between the two statements. In the Republic's "city in speech", Socrates and Adeimantus agree that Ion's type of poetry is to be held unlawful, and banished. Socrates admits that he finds this kind of poetry sacred, wonderful and pleasing, implying that he is forced reluctantly to sacrifice it for the sake of the justice of the city and the health and moderation of the nonphilosophers. In the Ion, on the other hand, when Socrates plays the part of the city of Athens at the end of the dialogue, Ion is explicitly offered the choice of being held "divine". The difference between the two cases, obviously, is that in the "city in speech" Socrates and his young companions

have absolute power and can banish whomever and whatever they wish, whereas in Athens Socrates is, as he explicitly asserts in the Ion, just another private man (532de). And given this apparent "powerlessness", Socrates' practical "treatment" for the city of Athens is not to attempt any kind of radical reform of religion of the kind depicted in the Republic, but rather to attempt to bolster the "traditional" religious faith of a man who has considerable influence over public opinion in that his rhapsodic recitations are one of the chief means through which this religious tradition is transmitted to the many. At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates indicates that he is aware that in contemporary Athens the rhapsode is understood to have two functions: actually reciting Homer, and interpreting the poet's meaning (530b-c). Socrates initially emphasizes the second function, only to spend most of the dialogue convincingly demonstrating to Ion that he is not, in fact, able to provide anything like an adequate interpretation of Homer. The "myth of the magnet" on the other hand, does provide Ion with a plausible and flattering explanation of his proficiency in the first of the two functions of the rhapsode, namely reciting Homer in such a fashion that it "seizes" the spectators' souls. Something of what Socrates is trying to accomplish is indicated by the fact that words derived from dikein, "to do justice" do not occur in the dialogue; the subject of justice is treated only "negatively", as it were, in that Ion's choice in the conclusion is to be held to be "not unjust" (541e-b). That is, given the practical impossibility of transforming Athens into anything like the "perfect" city of the Republic, the Ion indicates that it is Socrates' view that the best state of affairs for "ordinary" men like Ion and the multitude who follow him is an essentially unquestioning belief in the traditional religion. Despite his elsewhere

harshly criticizing Homeric poetry for promoting injustice, Socrates does appear to consider this poetry's ennobling view of the world superior to the bourgeois greed that follows from "secularization".

Thus we may say that the Ion provides us with an "existential portrait" of the Socratic philosopher in action, motivated by the twin concerns of a desire for knowledge and a desire to benefit or act justly towards his fellow men. It thus constitutes a Platonic defence of Socrates against the charges of the advocates of the "good old times" (referred to by Nietzsche) that Socrates had a corrupting and instinct-degenerating effect on the city of Athens.[18] I have already noted that Ion is one of Socrates' least "elite" or most "common" interlocutors; the dramatic action of the dialogue seems clearly to suggest that at least with respect to the question of the extent to which ordinary people like Ion and most of his audience should be encouraged to accept as true the "orthodox" religion of their political community, Socrates is at one with the advocates of the "good old times" and opposed to any attempt to promote widespread popular "enlightenment". This concern to promote religious orthodoxy is not incompatible with the radical questioning of all orthodoxies required by the philosophic life because Socrates' acute psychological knowledge allows him to adjust his speech to the nature of his interlocutor or interlocutors. Thus while Ion's unselfconscious ignorance, "emptiness", and corresponding lack of philosophic "promise" make him the perfect interlocutor for Socrates' philosophical investigation of the question of poetry's "divine power", these

---

[18]See above, p. 55.

qualities also allow Plato to show the reader with particular clarity the philosopher's political accommodation to his interlocutors.

CHAPTER 3: THE DRAMA OF THE ION

If we combine the observations about philosophical esotericism in the first part of my Introduction with the results of our "search" for Socrates' intentions in chapter 2, we see that the course of the discussion in the Ion - as in all Platonic dialogues - is determined by a combination of philosophic and political (or non-philosophic) factors. The reader's task is to "work through" the political or dramatic aspects of the dialogue in search of the philosophic teaching - about, among other things, politics and poetry - bearing in mind that the teaching about true justice implied by Socrates' (and Plato's) esotericism is part of the philosophic teaching. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, only such searching for knowledge as is motivated by a quest for justice is truly deserving of the name "philosophy".[1] With considerations like these in mind, I now propose to follow the argument and action of Plato's Ion in a more detailed fashion.

I: THE TITLE AND DRAMATIC SETTING

Plato himself, as distinguished from his characters, speaks to us most directly in each of his dialogues through his choice of title and of dramatic setting. The title of the Ion appears to be relatively "straightforward": it is one of 27 Platonic dialogues named after individual men. And, as is usually the case with titles of this kind, the person named in the title of the Ion is clearly Socrates' chief interlocutor. In fact, he is Socrates' only

---

[1] "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", section 6, p. 89. Compare p. 15, note 49 above.

interlocutor, there being no evidence that anyone else is present at the discussion. As I noted above, these facts probably entitle us to conclude that something about the nature of Ion and Ion's type of man and of Socrates' characteristic manner of dealing with this kind of man will be on display in the dialogue. The relatively "uncomplicated" nature of the title and the action can be taken as a further confirmation of my assertion that the Ion is dramatically "early" in that it remains close to the concerns of everyday life. We are clearly expected to understand that Socrates' speeches in the Ion are considerably more "exoteric" than those of more complicated and "layered" dialogues such as the Symposium. To stay with this example, there is considerable emphasis in the Symposium on the private, or even subversive or sacrilegious nature of the discussion in that dialogue;[2] in the Ion, on the other hand, despite the fact that the conversation is "private" in that it appears that no-one else is listening, Socrates and Ion apparently meet and engage in their discussion in a public place. Indeed, the absence of any specific indication as to who is or is not present - there is nothing in the dialogue that absolutely precludes the possibility of a follower of Ion's silently listening to the whole discussion, for example - combined with the lack of indication about where the dialogue takes place, can be taken as evidence that these factors are in a sense unimportant; the discussion in the Ion could take place almost "anywhere".

But let us return to the title. As Penelope Murray notes, the Ion is our only

---

[2]See S. Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. 7-8.

evidence for the existence of an actual rhapsode named 'Ion'.[3] This is not surprising: rhapsodes were apparently regarded by the educated Athenian aristocracy as "lower class", and hence as unworthy of their notice.[4] As I noted before, Ion lives up to this stereotype in a number of ways. Strauss notes that despite his assertion in the Apology of Socrates that he interrogated the craftsmen (22c-e), Socrates is in fact never shown in dialogue with these people. As Strauss puts it:

> [Socrates] converses in deed (as distinguished from his self-presentation in his sole public speech) only with people who are not common people - who belong in one way or another to an elite, although never, or almost never, to the elite in the highest sense.[5]

As I noted earlier, we are probably entitled to view Ion as one of Socrates' least "elite" interlocutors, in the same league as Euthyphro and the unphilosophic multitude of the Apology. In this dialogue, Socrates converses, if not precisely with an "ordinary" person or craftsman, at least with a man who devotes his life to shaping the opinions of the multitude, and as such may even be regarded as a "representative" of their opinions. And given Socrates' obvious intention to benefit rather than unsettle or provoke (as in the Apology) this rather ordinary man, we are entitled, I think, to conclude that the Ion provides us with a paradigm of Socrates' "exoteric" or medicinal accommodation to the average person's inability to comprehend philosophy. Indeed, Ion's very "anonymity"

---

[3]Plato on Poetry, p. 99.

[4]Compare Xenophon, Memorabilia 4.2.10 (end).

[5]The City and Man, p. 57.

seems to point in this direction; despite his skill at rhapsody, Ion is simply not all that "unusual" of a man. There is no way to determine whether or not an actual rhapsode named Ion ever existed; but the repeated emphasis on Ion's "selflessness" or the fact that he is a product of "public opinion" probably entitles us to conclude that for our purposes it doesn't really matter; we can treat Ion as an individual made up by Plato[6].

Whether or not an actual rhapsode named Ion ever existed, Plato's choosing to depict Socrates engaged in a dialogue with a man named Ion seems to indicate that he expects his readers to recall a more famous Ion, the mythic son of Apollo (or Xouthos) and Kreousa who founded the Ionian race. Our major source for this myth is Euripides' play Ion.[7] Now, Euripides is mentioned once in Plato's Ion, at the beginning of the first "myth of the magnet" (533d); this may be a Platonic hint to his readers to call to mind Euripides' version of the Ion myth specifically. The Euripidean play does provide us with what seems to be a plausible account of the meaning of the name 'Ion'. In the play, Xouthos, the foreign husband of Kreousa, the Erechtheid queen of Athens, has come to Delphi to ask if he will ever have a son. Apollo (falsely) informs him that he already has a son, and that the first person he meets on leaving (exion) the temple will be that very son. Xouthos emerges from the temple, sees the as yet unnamed Ion (who is a temple

---

[6]This is in contrast to historically well-known interlocutors like Nicias or Alcibiades, where - as finely crafted as Plato's portrait of every interlocutor inevitably is - our understanding of the dialogue is clearly enhanced by "outside" historical information.

[7]See A. Saxonhouse, Fear of Diversity, p. 80. Euripides' version is the only one we know of with Apollo rather than Xouthos as Ion's father.

attendant), and decides to name him Ion ("coming" or "going") in Greek because it fits the way they met (661-3). This interpretation of the meaning of the name Ion provides some support to my assertions above that Ion is one of the most "ordinary" of Socrates' interlocutors; as with Xouthos' situation, Ion may simply have been (metaphorically) the first person Socrates saw when he was "going" somewhere. In Plato's dialogue the name is also, of course, an ironic commentary on Ion's propensity to travel (cf. 530a), like his mythic counterpart who apparently undergoes numerous travels and adventures after those depicted in the Euripidean play as he founds the Ionic race.[8]

There also seems to be an affinity of character between the two Ions. When we first meet Euripides' Ion, he is completely and unselfconsciously devoted to his religious duties as an attendant at the Oracle, unaware of the larger world. As Hermes puts it in the Prologue: "His life has been one song of purity, serving the temple" (54-55). Similarly, prior to Socrates' troubling cross-examination, the Platonic Ion seems to have engaged in his rhapsody in a serene and unselfconscious state, confident of his supreme merit as a rhapsode (530c7-d3) and - in spite of any more material concerns (535e) - of divine sanction for his activity (530b4). Yet we soon note that the "divine innocence" of both Ions seems to be surprisingly fragile. When the Euripidean Ion's mother Kreousa first recounts her rape at the hands of Apollo, Ion is shocked and initially refuses to believe the tale (339-344). However, he quickly comes to the view that the god has acted unjustly

---

[8]See N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, edd., The Oxford Classical Dictionary, p. 549.

(356), and condemns the gods' hypocrisy for violating laws which they supposedly enforce (436-451). By the exodus he is prepared to pull a suppliant from Apollo's shrine in order to exact revenge (1312-9). Now, as I have already suggested, the materialism that uneasily coexists with whatever genuine piety the Platonic Ion feels is hardly as violent a force as the Euripidean Ion's sudden anti-Apollonian fervour, but it may perhaps have an pernicious effect on Ion's soul and the souls of his audience.

As to the dialogue's dramatic date, John D. Moore convincingly argues that the Ion must be dated sometime before the Ionian revolt of 412 that followed the Sicilian disaster.[9] The major evidence in support of this conclusion is Ion's statement to Socrates at 541c that "our city [Ephesus] is ruled by your people and commanded by your generals and needs no general". And we may speculate that the discussion takes place at some point not too long before the disaster and the subsequent revolt. In the first place, Socrates asks Ion "Weren't you Ephesians originally Athenians, and isn't Ephesus a city inferior to none?" (542de). Questions like this would have a particular relevance during a time when the empire, including Ion's home city of Ephesus (530a), was revolting or was about to revolt. It is possible that we can detect just a trace of the resentment of an imperial subject who is pondering revolt in Ion's assertion that his city needs no general because it already has an Athenian as general, and that neither of the Greek great powers would choose him as a general "because you suppose you are sufficient" (541c).

---

[9]"The Dating of Plato's Ion", pp. 425-438. This is the best discussion that I have been able to find of the dialogue's dramatic date.

II: THE PRELUDE

Socrates and Ion encounter one another, apparently by chance, in some unspecified public place. Since they are not interrupted in the course of their discussion, we can assume that they are not at some kind of private party; and since Socrates immediately asks Ion from which foreign city he has just come (530a1-2), we can assume that the meeting has not been prearranged in any way, although it is possible that Socrates, who seems well-informed about Ion's activities, has somehow heard of Ion's arrival in Athens and has made a deliberate effort to "bump into him". (The philosopher is certainly remarkably eager to talk to the rhapsode.) Indeed, both men are at least acquainted with the other, in that they both recognize each other without any need for an introduction (530a1, a3). Socrates knows without having to be told that Ion is a rhapsode (530a5). This of course is not an indication that he knows Ion all that well on a personal level, since Ion is clearly "famous" (530b1, 530d6-8, 535d4-5) and hence would be known to anyone who takes an interest in popular festivals and the well-known rhapsodes at these festivals (as Socrates clearly does (530a5-6, 530b1, 530b5-10, 535b-e; cf. Republic 327a)). As to Ion, I have noted that he at least recognizes Socrates (530a3), and he may be aware in advance of Socrates' popular reputation as a "wise man" (532d4-5; cf. Apology of Socrates 18b), although it is worth noting that he uses this term only after Socrates has been cross-examining him for several minutes. Given the composure with which he accepts Socrates' ironic flattery, he may simply presume that Socrates is another "fan".

The prelude is filled with references to Ion's travelling. This emphasis begins with

the first words of the dialogue, Ion's name (ton Iona): as is explicitly noted in the Euripidean Ion, the name literally means "coming" or "going".[10] Given the air of "bustle" imparted to the first few lines of the dialogue by these references, we may wish to conjecture that the conversation takes place either at the Piraeus or in the Agora. Ion may have just arrived from Epidaurus, or he may have been in town for (at most) a few days. The theme of travel continues in the second sentence as Socrates asks, "From where have you come to visit us now?" (530a1-2). Socrates' choice of word for "having come to visit" (epidedemekas, in the perfect tense) is interesting, in that the verb epidemein is derived from epi-demios or "among the people" (from which we get our word "epidemic").[11] That is, Ion's status as a man of the people or a man who works among the people is emphasized from the outset (compare 535d). This choice of verb also introduces what seems to be another theme of this section (and perhaps of the entire dialogue) namely the question of whether and to what extent Ion is an "Athenian" or an "Ionian".[12] This is because epidemein has two distinct meanings: for a citizen, it means to come home from foreign parts, while for a foreigner, it means to stay in a place or to be in town.[13] The two meanings of epidemein thus come together in the question of the extent to which Ion is "at

---

[10]See above, pp. 64-65 .

[11]See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, under epidemein for my discussion of this term.

[12]The question of what it means to "belong" to Athens or to Ionia seems to be one of the major themes of Euripides' Ion.

[13]In the perfect tense, as in the text, it acquires the meanings of "to have come to a place" (for a foreigner) or "to have returned home" (for a citizen).

one" with the Athenian demos that will constitute his audience while he is "in town". The fact that Socrates asks Ion from where he has come to visit us (i.e. us Athenians) indicates that, whatever else, Ion's "Athenianness" or even "Ionianness" is not simply unproblematic. Of course, one must also consider that Socrates' including himself as one of "us" Athenanians is highly ironic, in that he elsewhere indicates that there is a sense in which he, in his capacity as a philosopher, is a "foreigner" as well, and perhaps in a profounder sense.[14] So Ion and Socrates seem to have a bond in that neither of them is unproblematically a member of this political community; yet the two can also be contrasted in that the very sense in which Socrates is a foreigner is one in which Ion is akin.

The theme of political belonging continues in Socrates' third sentence, the first to provoke a response from Ion. Having asked Ion from where he has just arrived, Socrates goes on to ask, "From your home at Ephesus?" (530a2). This provokes an emphatic response from Ion: "In no way (oudamos), o Socrates..." (530a3). Was Socrates' question somehow intended to bait Ion and hence provoke him into responding? Perhaps Ion, priding himself on his cosmopolitanism and his extensive travel, is offended by the suggestion that he might be "stuck at home". Then again, perhaps there is something slightly offensive in Socrates' reference to Ion's Ephesian origins. Socrates returns to this theme again at the end of the dialogue when he asks Ion rather ironically, "Weren't you Ephesians originally Athenians, and isn't Ephesus a city inferior to none?" (541de). It is

---

[14]Compare L. Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli, p. 296.

possible that if, as I have argued, the dialogue takes place at a time near the Ionian revolt of 412, this question may not be entirely rhetorical. The entire discussion of "Ion of Ephesus"'s potential suitability as an Athenian general (541b-e) may acquire a peculiar poignancy for the reader once we recognize that Ion hails from a city that following the Ionian revolt was closely associated with both Lysander (the Spartan general who eventually occupied Athens) and the Persians.[15]

Socrates goes on to reply to Ion's assertion that he has carried off (enegkametha) first prize by remarking, "You speak well" (530b2). This is the first of a number of different remarks about types of speech; apart from "you speak well" (eu legeis), the two men will at various points say "you speak finely/beautifully" (kalos legeis), "you speak truly" (alethe legeis), and "you speak correctly" (orthos legeis). Socrates' responding "you speak well" to Ion's report of his success contains a subtle double meaning: Ion "speaks well" when he reports his success, but this very success is a result of "speaking well" (in his Homeric recitations). Whatever else, the repeated references to speaking well, speaking finely and so forth draw the reader's attention to the fact that all of Ion's actions, contests, victories and so forth take place in the medium of speech. Indeed, the rhapsode (in stark contrast to his heroes (535b, etc.)) hardly does anything at all (besides accompanying himself on the lyre and "mundane" actions like travelling, eating, sleeping, etc.). This is one of the things that makes his ultimately claiming to be a general (540dff) seem so ludicrous, in that we usually think of a general as a "man of action" par excellence

---

[15]See D. Kagan, The Fall of the Athenian Empire, p. 30, p. 271 and pp. 301-2.

and not "just a talker". And yet, if we think about it, many of a general's most important "actions" take place in the realm of speech (in the form of commands). I shall have more to say about the relationship between rhapsody and generalship in my discussion of Part III; here I would simply like to note that the fact that Ion also might be seen as a "mere talker" is an important aspect of his chosen way of life that he shares in common with Socrates, who also seems to do nothing but talk.[16] (This is not to deny, of course, that there is a great difference in the two men's intentions in their use of speech and in their understanding of the words which they speak.) Indeed, Socrates' interest in the immensely important role which logos plays in both the philosophic and non-philosophic ways of life must certainly count as one of the underlying reasons for his choosing to talk to a man whose life's work is, essentially, nothing but speeches.

This (apparently) common ground between the philosopher and the rhapsode is perhaps hinted at by the philosopher in the final two exchanges of the prelude (530a8-b4), in that the philosopher now speaks of the rhapsode as one of "us". It is, to say the least, unclear to whom this "us" refers. When Socrates asks whether Ion has competed "for us" (530a8), it is possible that Ion takes him as meaning "us Ionians" or even "us Athenians". Yet Socrates goes on to urge Ion to seek victory for "us" in the Panathenaia (530b2). It hardly seems likely that Ion was or will be the only Ionian in either of these competitions. The vague "us" to whom Socrates refers is maybe understood by the rhapsode to mean simply "us 'literary' men" (in the broadest sense of the term), "us 'workers in speech'".

---

[16]Compare Apology of Socrates 31c.

The vagueness of the apparent antecedent of the word "us" may also be taken as an allusion to Ion's "cosmopolitanism", his lack of clear membership in a "closed" political community.

III: PART I: THE TECHNE OF THE RHAPSODE PART I

Having persuaded Ion to stop and talk, Socrates embarks on a long paragraph of praise of Ion's rhapsodic techne (530b-c). Socrates seems to know Ion well enough to realize that flattery is the way to the rhapsode's heart, although one is obliged to reflect that flattery with respect to wisdom at the beginning of a conversation followed by a Socratic "discovery" of a "small problem" with the alleged wisdom, which quickly leads to "aporia", is a common Socratic technique. Indeed, flattery with respect to wisdom seems in and of itself to be a means of testing the nature of an interlocutor, in that more spirited, intelligent and reflective interlocutors like Thrasymachus are not fooled by such Socratic irony.[17] The serenely self-confident Ion, by contrast, seems not to notice any potential

---

[17]Compare Republic 336e-a. Compare also the following remark by Leo Strauss: "According to Xenophon, Socrates' art of conversation was twofold. When someone contradicted him on any point, he went back to the assumption underlying the whole dispute by raising the question "what is..." regarding the subject matter of the dispute and by answering it step by step; in this way the truth became manifest to the very contradictors. But when he discussed a subject on his own initiative, i.e. when he talked to people who merely listened, he proceeded through generally accepted opinions and thus produced agreement to an extraordinary degree.... It may seem strange that Socrates treated the contradictors better than the docile people.... [Socrates] approached differently the men possessing good natures by whom he was naturally attracted on the one hand, and the various types of men lacking good natures on the other. The men possessing good natures are the gifted ones: those who are quick to learn, have a good memory and are desirous for all worthwhile subjects of learning. It would not be strange if Socrates had tried to lead those who are able to think toward the truth and to lead others toward agreement in salutary opinions or to confirm them in such opinions." The City and Man,

irony on Socrates' part. Of course, Ion seems not to be very well-acquainted with Socrates whereas Thrasymachus knows the philosopher well enough to speak of his "habitual irony".[18] This in and of itself is probably evidence that despite his claims to be familiar with certain Homeric interpreters (530c-d), Ion does not really move in the same cultivated intellectual Athenian circles as Thrasymachus and Socrates; Ion is essentially a "worker among the demos" and Socrates will eventually encourage him to stay that way.

For now, the philosopher seems intent on testing the rhapsode's nature, presumably to confirm any prior views he may have had on this matter. In keeping with the view which I outlined in chapter 2 that Socrates will eventually engage in an act of justice in persuading Ion to return to a strictly "traditional" or "religious" or "orthodox" view of Homeric poetry, the philosopher here seems intent on assessing the extent to which Ion has adopted a more "secularized" view of Homer (and hence of the cosmos in general). His purpose in discussing Ion's role as an interpreter of Homer seems to be to try to prod the rhapsode into explaining how he conceives this role (530b-c). Yet this paragraph is also the crucial evidence for the contention that Socrates is motivated to speak to Ion by some kind of desire for knowledge. In addition to the obvious possibilities that he may be seeking to learn something about the interpretation of Homer from Ion, and that he may be seeking to learn something about Ion's type of soul, Socrates' emphasis on rhapsody as an art that interprets the thought of the poet to the listeners indicates he may also wish to

---

pp. 53-54.

[18]Republic, 337a.

learn something about the rhetorical power of rhapsody in controlling the opinions of the many.[19] His interest in learning about "the irrational" and its place in human life of course follows from his interest in Homer, "the first teacher and leader of all these fine tragic things" (Republic 595bc), "the best and most divine of the poets" (Ion 530b).

Socrates states three times in three different ways that the rhapsode must understand the thought of the poet. In the first place, this repetition probably serves the purpose of making sure that Ion understands Socrates' meaning. Yet the first speech also seems (like the two versions of the myth in the centre of the dialogue) to be an example of the philosopher's capacity for bewitching rhetoric. Its flattery apparently lays hold of Ion's soul (cf. 535a) to such an extent that the rhapsode responds enthusiastically that Socrates speaks "truly" (530c). Ion seems very ready to assert that Socrates speaks "truly" both here and later in the dialogue (531d, 535a, 538b, 539d), whereas the philosopher is a good deal more cautious in applying this phrase to Ion, applying it directly to a statement by the rhapsode only once (539d). That is, Ion, like most people, doesn't view the truth (at least about subjects related to his area of expertise) as anything all that problematic; he simply listens to Socrates' statements and if they seem to make sense to him, he calls them "true" without much further ado. Socrates, on the other hand, is much less prone simply to accept statements as unproblematically true; in response to Ion's assertion that no-one who has ever lived has had so many fine thoughts about Homer as he, the philosopher

---

[19]See above, p. 49, for the four types of knowledge which I argued that Socrates may be seeking in this dialogue.

more cautiously replies, "You speak well" (530d). Of course, Ion's claim that he is the greatest interpreter of Homer who has ever lived is hardly something that Socrates is likely to believe (in contrast to Ion's view of Socrates' flattering assessment of his talents), but Plato does seem to indicate a contrast between the two men's view of "truth" through their uses of these two phrases.

This contrast is also evident in the two men's attitudes towards each others' rhetoric. Ion apparently simply accepts Socrates' first long rhetorical speech as true, while Socrates refuses to be "swept away" by a display of Ion's bewitching rhapsody and instead embarks on a series of questions. It may seem puzzling that Socrates first asks Ion for a display of his talent (530d4-5) and then abruptly changes his mind (531a1) despite Ion's apparently being perfectly willing to oblige him (530d6-8). Perhaps the philosopher changes his mind upon learning about (or perhaps merely confirming his previous view about) what the nature of Ion's display of his talents in speaking about Homer will be. The rhapsode states that he has "adorned" (kekosmeka) (530d7) Homer; presumably this means that he recites the text in a fashion that appeals to his spectators' emotions and desires for beauty. Does Ion even attempt to shed light on "what the poet means" (as he seems to have claimed (530cd)), or is he simply a reciter? It is possible that Ion's "interpretation" and "praise" of Homer consists merely of statements like, "Have you ever heard a finer depiction of x than ..." followed by a rhapsodic recitation of an appropriate passage.

This problem of the extent to which Ion actually does attempt to explain the inner meaning of the Homeric poems is one of the most important interpretive issues in our attempt to understand the dialogue's teaching. It seems clear that Ion is aware that the contemporary view of "the art of rhapsody" is that its practitioner has two tasks, reciting Homer and explaining the poet's meaning to the listeners. This is evident in the first place from the fact that Ion cites as his immediate "competition" men who were apparently reasonably well-known for their naturalistic and allegorical interpretations of Homer.[20] It hardly seems likely that Ion is capable of formulating such interpretations for himself; indeed, it is unclear whether he is capable of understanding them at all. Yet Ion is not at all perplexed by Socrates' crediting him with proficiency in this regard; he rather accepts it as his due, and claims to have worked very hard at perfecting it (530c). Now, it is highly likely that someone as boastful as Ion must have spoken publicly before of this alleged ability of his to interpret the "inner" meaning of the poet; indeed, in this very speech he demands the highest public recognition for his efforts, a golden crown from the Homeridae (530d). It is possible that Socrates has somehow heard of Ion's claim to be able to interpret Homer's inner meaning, and is motivated to speak to the rhapsode in the first place by a desire to see if there is anything to this ability, but in the second place by a concern that Ion not present this less orthodox, more "secular" interpretation of Homer to the assembled multitude - something which the self-important Ion, of course, would be all too prone to do if he thought he had some wisdom in this matter. And even if Ion cannot formulate original allegorical interpretations of his own, he may well be able to parrot

---

[20]See A. Bloom's note 4 to p. 357 of his translation of the Ion.

other people's or parts of other people's. As I noted in my discussion of Platonic esotericism in the first part of the Introduction, any author who wishes to conceal dangerous truths faces a real problem with men who are somehow "in between" the unreflective opinions of the many and philosophical wisdom, for many of these men may wish to show off their alleged wisdom by publicizing or popularizing teachings or parts of teachings of the master of which they have somehow taken a hold.[21] Perhaps the same problem can be found in the Homeridae, especially with the emergence of interpreters like Metrodorus and Stesimbrotus who take it upon themselves to reveal something of what Homer concealed. Whatever the exact nature of Ion's attempts to interpret Homer, Socrates' apparently destructive cross-examinations in Parts I and III serve the purpose of destroying any claims on Ion's part to interpret Homer's thought; the account of Ion's ability provided by the "divine" account of the myth of the magnet encourages Ion to be simply a reciter of Homer.

Socrates embarks on this cross-examination by asking Ion whether he is "clever" only about Homer, or about Hesiod and Archilochus also (531a). This question seems to have been carefully chosen to eventually drive Ion to aporia. In his long speech at the beginning of part I, Socrates indicates that he is envious of Ion's concerning himself with many good poets and above all with Homer, "the best and most divine of the poets" (530b). This comment points strongly to the possibility that Socrates was aware before the discussion began that Ion claims to be an expert on Homer alone. The philosopher

---

[21]See above, pp. 12-13.

receives further indications that this is the case in Ion's repeated references to himself as a champion of Homeric interpretation (530cd), deserving of a golden crown from the Homeridae (530d); the rhapsode does not make any mention of other poets. So Socrates poses his question with at least a strong suspicion that Ion will reply exactly as he does, namely that he is an expert only on Homer, "for that seems sufficient to me" (531a). Now, by earlier emphasizing Ion's supposed possession of an art (530b6, b7), a point which Ion is led to accept (530c8), Socrates has laid the groundwork for his "refutation" of Ion. In accepting Socrates' contention that he possesses an art, Ion probably has only the vaguest understanding of what an art is; that is, he probably simply equates it with knowledge. (Socrates, perhaps following Ion's view in this matter, will later conflate the two as well (532c6, 541e2)). Having obtained Ion's acknowledgement that he is "clever" only about Homer, the philosopher proceeds on the basis of the assumption that any art has a "universalizing" tendency in that it should be able to deal with <u>all</u> of the sphere of the world in which it claims to have competence (cf. 532d). To anticipate one of Socrates' examples (531e, 538b-c), the art of medicine deals with the health of the <u>whole</u> human body. Of course, there are doctors who specialize in, say, the heart; but this specialist will work with and recognize the competence of other specialists in producing the health of the whole body, and thus at least implicitly acknowledge a master art of medicine that directs all subordinate specialists. So, once Ion has accepted Socrates' implicit premise that the art of rhapsody deals with poetry as a whole, his claim that Homer is sufficient cannot stand. Ion's rhapsodic skill must at least <u>potentially</u> be transferable to other poets. The only way Ion could avoid a refutation of his claim to possess an art would be to claim that Homer

truly is sufficient in that his "wisdom" encompasses that of all the other poets; but Socrates implicitly draws the conclusion that Ion does not believe that this is the case from the rhapsode's admission that there are many things about which the poets do not say the same things (531b).

The rhapsode's key concession is encapsulated in his reply to Socrates' question, "And is there any matter about which Hesiod and Homer say the same things?" (531a). Ion, presumably thinking of their discussions of certain gods and heroes, replies "yes". On this basis, Socrates will eventually conclude that the art of rhapsody has one subject matter - poetry as a whole - and hence that the possessor of this art should be able to be "clever" about any poet (532b). He will then use the fact that Ion by his own admission is not clever about poets other than Homer to argue that Ion therefore does not possess an art. Yet this conclusion is by no means certain. In the first place, because of his view that Homer is "sufficient" (531a), Ion has clearly made very little effort to interpret other poets. But, in poetic interpretation as in other things, practice to a certain extent makes perfect. From the fact that a given person cannot at the present moment interpret more than one poet, we are not entitled to conclude that it is impossible that this person would be able to interpret other poets if they were to really "work at it". Indeed, at least in my own experience, great dramatic and literary works become more "interesting" the better one knows them; to an extent, Ion's alertness when people talk about Homer and sleepiness when people talk about other poets (532bc) may be simply a result of his much greater "familiarity" with Homer. In the second place, we can perfectly comprehend the

case of, for example, a critic who refuses to judge performances of the works of certain composers because he is conscious that he lacks a "feeling" for the music of these composers. This case is comprehensible because we recognize that in addition to an ability to judge the musician's "technical" skills of playing notes accurately, a critic also needs to be able to judge the musician's "feeling" for the work. To apply this insight to the present case, the dichotomy with which Socrates concludes the Ion is false: one does not interpret Homer either by art or by inspiration, but through a combination of these two elements.[22] Ion's supposed art of interpreting Homer would include "technical" elements like knowledge of metre, modes of diction, and so forth, as well an ability to discuss the motivations of various characters and so forth; but these elements of the "art of interpretation" must be supplemented by a "feeling" for Homer. That is, we would probably say that a person who can competently explain every technical or rational element of the Iliad but who has no "feeling" for the "tragedy of Achilles" which it depicts does not, in fact, fully understand the poem.

So Ion is unusual only in that he claims to be an expert in one poet and one poet alone. He could try to make a claim that his alleged outstanding ability in the interpretation of Homer is due in part to divine inspiration without thereby necessarily undermining his claim to possess an "art". Socrates will later comment that "each of the arts has been assigned by the gods the power of knowing some work" (537c). This comment serves to remind us that there is an element of "inspiration" or "divine insight" in almost all arts:

---

[22]This is the thesis of C. Janaway's useful article "Craft and Fineness in Plato's Ion".

some people are just good at shoemaking, while others are not. And even within the humbler arts, a person may be skilled only at a particular part of that art without thereby undermining his claim to possess an art. For example, a shoemaker might be talented only in making a certain kind of shoe without thereby necessarily undermining his claim to possess an art. To apply this insight to Ion's case, Socrates conflates the individual named Ion's limitations with the limitations of his skill or art as such; because the possessor of the rhapsodic art named Ion cannot interpret poets other than Homer it does not follow that another rhapsode cannot do so, and hence it does not necessarily follow that Ion does not possess a part of the rhapsodic art. Socrates seems to spend the balance of the discussion giving Ion a series of hints in an effort to push the rhapsode into coming up with this thought on his own. Presumably if Ion had passed Socrates' test by producing the required thought on his own, the subsequent course of the discussion would have been different. As it is, the clearest evidence that Ion does not possess an art of any kind is the fact that his own success is essentially a mystery to him; he is unable to offer anything approaching a rational account of his own activity. The philosopher's explicit arguments first that Ion must be clever about all poets and second that Ion does not possess a "rhapsodic" art of interpretation are all badly flawed in a variety of ways; but the fact that Ion does not challenge or even recognize these flaws is probably the strongest evidence that he does not, in fact, possess anything approaching a rational art.

Questioning Ion about "those matters about which [Homer and Hesiod] do not say the same things" Socrates cites his first example of a specialized art: divination (531b).

The philosopher sets up a rather strange dichotomy: of the things which the poets say about divination, would Ion the rhapsode give a better explanation or would one of the diviners (531b)? Ion replies "one of the diviners". Socrates uses this concession throughout the remainder of the dialogue to speak as though the capacity to competently judge the "whole" of a Homeric poem is divided among various specialized arts. (Compare 536de: Socrates simply assumes that the rhapsode must speak well about one thing in Homer, and this assumption underlies the entire subsequent discussion in Part III which eventually culminates in Ion's claim to be a general.) The philosopher also makes the highly questionable assumption that the sole issue is the poet's knowledge (as opposed to his poetic charm). Ion could make a more adequate reply by challenging this Socratic assumption and claiming that his art of rhapsody understands the "whole" of a Homeric poem precisely insofar as it is a whole or a unity. (This would of course lead to the further question of the basis of the poem's wholeness.) Socrates ignores the fact that different arts or different types of knowledge can grasp the same object in different aspects. For example, for the brickmaker, bricks are the "form" which he produces out of the "matter" of mud, while for the bricklayer, bricks are the "matter" out of which he produces the "form" of a wall. And to remain with this housebuilding example, the architect or designer of the house as a whole obviously requires some understanding of the subordinate arts which produce the various parts of the house, but he does not need to know everything about, say, bricklaying (much less brickmaking). Indeed, the architect will have a better understanding of the object of bricklaying - a wall - insofar as it is the architect's art with its vision of a whole house which supplies this end to the bricklayer. Thus Ion could well

have attempted to claim that, insofar as it allows him to grasp a poem as a whole, his alleged rhapsodic art of interpretation would provide a better explanation of an instance of divining found in that poem.

Socrates again seems to try - and to fail - to get Ion to formulate this thought for himself. This is clearly one of his intentions in the next stage of the discussion, which begins with a fairly long speech describing in the most general terms the subjects of Homer's poetry (531c-d). The philosopher lists what seem to be four kinds of elements in this poetry: (1) war; (2) associations (a) of good and bad human beings, (b) of human beings who are private (idioton) and in public works (demiourgon), (c) of gods with each other, and (d) of gods with human beings; (3) events in the heavens and in Hades; (4) the begettings (geneseis) of gods and heroes. This list can be seen as comprehending "the whole" of things as presented by the poets, implicitly including subjects like the good life for an individual, the good regime, the origins, nature, and evolution of the cosmos and the intelligent beings within the cosmos, and so forth. It seems to move from "political philosophy" to "metaphysics" by beginning with a subject that is perhaps the highest concern of human politics - war - and finishing with one that is completely outside the realm of human control - the genesis of the elements of the whole.[23] Now, this list is important in that it seems to be peculiarly human to wonder about these things, and Ion's rhapsody clearly provides the authoritative answers that "the many" in the Athenian

---

[23]Although the fact that the begettings of heroes as well as those of gods are included in the list provides a link between the human and the divine realms.

community accept. It is interesting in this light to compare this with the list of "the greatest and fairest things about which Homer attempts to speak" in Republic Book 10: "wars, and commands of armies and governance of cities, and about the education of a human being" (599cd). What stands out is that Socrates' statement in the Republic omits mention of the gods, while in the Ion he omits mention of education. Given that Socrates' major interlocutors in the Republic are clearly much more philosophically gifted than Ion, we can assert that tales about the gods replace education for "the many".[24] It is also interesting that both lists begin with war, and contain no corresponding discussion of peace. Yet in both discussions there is mention of associations or of governance of cities, implying at least a temporary peace within the city; a universe that was completely without peace would be completely chaotic, whereas it does seem that at least temporary islands of peace can be found in the world.

Socrates asks Ion whether the poets other than Homer make poetry about these things; Ion replies, "Yes, but, Socrates, they have not made poetry in a way similar to Homer" (531d). Ion seems to be "grasping" for the view which I outlined above that truly "understanding" a poem requires not only comprehension of its "technical" aspects but also a non-technical or "divinely inspired" individual "insight" into and appreciation of its "poetic" aspects. The myth of the magnet which Socrates tells in part II of the Ion is a

---

[24]Of course, the guardians in the Republic are also first educated in tales which are "as a whole, false, though there are true things in them too"; however, Socrates is also careful to indicate that (some of them?) will later be educated in true speeches (376e-a). The many, on the other hand, never advance beyond the first kind of tale.

radicalization of this view which Ion somehow holds but is unable to put into words, in that Socrates' myth completely suppresses the technical or rational aspects of the rhapsode's activity and makes it entirely a matter of divine inspiration. Following Ion's statement that the other poets have not made their poetry in a way similar to Homer, Socrates continues ironically to attempt to maintain the thesis that rhapsody is an art by getting Ion to agree that Homer is "better" than other poets (531d). Better and worse are of course relative terms which imply comparison by means of a common standard of judgement, so the discussion quickly reaches the conclusion that Ion (assumed to be the possessor of a "rhapsodic art") must be able to judge Homer and all the other poets too (532b). By way of reaching this conclusion, Socrates argues by analogy from two other arts whose practitioners would be competent to judge both "speaking well" and "speaking badly" about their subjects: arithmetic (531d-e) and medicine (531e). Arithmetic is an interesting example, in that it seems to be the most rational or "universalizable" art in existence, the very model of certain knowledge. When I add a series of numbers, I know that I understand them in exactly the same way that every other person who grasps this "art" understands it. Arithmetic is in this respect the polar opposite of divination, which is notorious for resulting in highly ambiguous prophecies. That is, arithmetic is the art whose practitioners manifest (in principle) perfect agreement as to the validity of a certain set of results, while divination is probably the art whose practitioners manifest the least agreement regarding their results - so much so that it would not generally be regarded as a genuine art. It is interesting to note, however, that despite its being the most rational of arts, arithmetic still seems to offer some scope for human "gifts" or "inspiration" - some

people are just "good at math". Mathematics' perfect rationality makes it a natural "paradigm" for knowledge. Indeed, many have tried to take it as a paradigm for philosophy; yet it seems clear that there are elements of the cosmos which cannot be described mathematically; a mathematical account of the whole is thus necessarily incomplete.

Thus far, the philosopher has provided two examples of arts, namely divination and arithmetic. The radical differences between the two arts seem to point to a schism within the human soul itself between "logic" and "feeling", or what Pascal termed the ésprit de géometrie and the ésprit de finesse. That is, the ability to be a diviner seems to be critically dependent on a mysterious kind of non-rational insight which leads to a feeling of subjective certainty about the results of one's divination; anyone who is unable to share this feeling must either simply accept the diviner's report about the results of his attempts at divination or else seek "external" evidence for the diviner's veracity. Diviners also seem especially prone to provide results whose meanings are far from clear.[25] Mathematics (including arithmetic), on the other hand, is the very model of intersubjective certainty, in that any human being of sufficient intelligence should be able to produce its results for himself, and these results are completely clear and precise. In terms of the dichotomy

---

[25]Herodotus relates that Croesus, king of the Lydians, tested a variety of oracles by having his messengers ask what Croesus was doing at a pre-arranged time; on the basis of this test the king concluded that only the oracle at Delphi was a genuine oracle. However, the king was subsequently led to a disastrous defeat at the hands of Cyrus because he failed to correctly interpret the oracle's ambiguous prediction that if he made war on Cyrus he would destroy a mighty empire, not realizing that this statement could apply to his own empire. (1.46-53).

between divination and mathematics, Ion's rhapsodic recitations are clearly much closer to divination than mathematics. Indeed, Socrates' arguments in the course of the dialogue seem designed to convince Ion to engage solely in "divinatory" rhapsodic performances and not to attempt any kind of rational explanation of the thought of the poet. The philosopher will later indicate that rhapsody (and other "divine" arts such as divination) seem to owe their persuasive power to their ability to appeal to the irrational or (given the pervasiveness of logos in human life) subrational elements of our psyches (535b, etc.). We are certain that the story of Achilles is a great tragedy of a noble man because we feel it to be so; we all feel "poetic" emotions such as fear and anger and pity and empathize with the imaginary poetic characters on that basis. And yet mathematics also contains a link to human "feelings" in that we can all experience the certainty of its results; mathematical or logical logos has a persuasiveness of its own. Just as one cannot "know" the Iliad without having been emotionally affected by it, so too one cannot "know" the Pythagorean theorem without having deduced it for oneself.

The possibility of an art that combines knowledge of "logic" with knowledge of "feeling" is indicated in Socrates' next example, the art of medicine (531e). Medicine enjoys a subtle prominence in the Ion, beginning with Ion's revelation that he has just come from the festival of Asclepius, god of healing (530a). Medicine's goal of health is something which we can both feel to be a good thing and know rationally to be a good thing. Ordinary medicine with its goal of bodily health can function as a paradigm or at least a "starting point" for Socratic political philosophy in that the goal of Socrates' "art"

can be understood as an expansion of ordinary medicine's goal of health to include comprehensive health of both body and soul. Mathematics is indeed the paradigm of pure rationality, but its very purity means that it cannot be "applied" to all parts of a world which contains much that is subrational. Medicine, on the other hand, applies a type of what we might term "practical" reasoning to the subrational bodies of the world; by extension, Socrates applies his practical wisdom to the subrational and rational parts of his interlocutors' souls. The philosopher's example of an application of the art of medicine is interesting in this respect: the doctor is the man who is competent to recognize what sorts of foods are healthy (531e). This same example of food is used in the dialogue's other reference to the art of medicine: the doctor is (supposedly) the man who will recognize whether Homer speaks finely in describing the potion which Nestor's concubine Hecamede gave to the wounded Machaon (538b-d). The point of these examples would seem to be that in theory, cookery should be an art completely subordinate to medicine; however, as we all know, in practice cooks set themselves up autonomously from medicine and provide food that pleases their customers' palates rather than promoting their bodily health. And if we take the view that in his capacity of benefitter of his fellow men and of himself Socrates is a true "soul doctor", then we might conclude that Ion's rhapsodic flattery of his audience's pleasurable passions is a kind of cookery for the soul. This line of speculation might be thought to be confirmed by another reference to a kind of food: in the midst of the first myth of the magnet speech, Socrates indicates that the lyric poets cull their songs "from fountains flowing with honey". Honey, of course, is a food that is very pleasant but not good for one's health, at least in large quantities.

Socrates' argument in this section culminates in the assertion that "the same man will always recognize who speaks well and who speaks badly when there are many speaking about the same things" (531e-a). The philosopher draws the conclusion that "Ion is similarly clever about Homer and the other poets, too, since he himself agrees that the same man will be an adequate judge of all who speak about the same things and since very nearly all of the poets make their poems about the same things" (532b). To this conclusion Ion responds that he is at a loss, since he has plenty to say about Homer, but dozes whenever any other poet is discussed (532bc). Socrates now makes a radical switch in his argument, asserting that far from being the possessor of an art and knowledgeable about all of the poets, Ion does not even speak by art at all (532c). The stages in this switch are interesting: (1) They reach a clear, rational conclusion on the basis of the premises which I have outlined above that Ion is an expert in all poets. (2) Ion notes that this conclusion does not square with his experience, which is that he is skilled only in speaking about Homer. (3) Socrates proposes an alternative hypothesis, which he explicitly terms a "guess" (532c5), that Ion is unable to speak about Homer by art and knowledge. Thus the stages in this switch provide us with a significant demonstration of the Socratic combination of "human experience" (exemplified by divination) and impersonal logos (exemplified by mathematics).

Socrates now makes one of the premises of the previous discussion explicit, arguing that the poetic art, like any art, has a subject matter that is a whole, and hence that the same manner of inquiry must hold throughout the art (532c-d). Now, according to

Aristodemus, at the end of the Symposium Socrates makes a similar argument for the wholeness of the poetic art, making it clear that this implies that the same man should be able to write tragedies and comedies. That is, the fully fledged art of tragedy is the same art as the fully fledged art of comedy (223d). And yet if we look at the history of poetry, we soon notice that the actual situation is much more like that which Socrates describes to Adeimantus in his critique of poetry in Books II and III of the Republic: the same men aren't capable of writing both tragedies and comedies (395a).[26] There are only a few exceptions to this general rule, Shakespeare and Plato (and possibly Homer if we consider the differences between the Iliad and the Odyssey) being among them. It is not clear precisely what one is supposed to make of this. Are we to conclude that poets who cannot write both comedies and tragedies possess a sub-technical skill rather than a full art? If we accept that the apparent implication of Socrates' list of the subjects of Homer's poetry at 531c-d is that the proper subject matter of the "art" of poetry is human life as a whole understood as part of the cosmos as a whole, are we to conclude that only a poet who is capable (at least in principle) of writing both comedy and tragedy can lay claim to have understood human life (which clearly consists of both tragedy and comedy) as a whole? Or, to put this another way, would not the possessor of a true art of poetry need to know the subject matter of poetry, i.e. know the whole of the human things? (All human lives obviously contain both comedy and tragedy.) These considerations seem to lead to the conclusion that the fully-fledged possessor of the art of poetry must be a philosopher, and

---

[26]Note that Socrates actually says that "the same men aren't capable of producing good imitations in both [tragedy and comedy] at the same time"; it is Adeimantus who goes on to say that "[t]he same men aren't capable of doing both".

that "ordinary" tragedians and comedians "anticipate" this philosophic poetry in the sense that they write about philosophic topics, often in a very persuasive way, but without fully being able to rationally defend their opinions on these subjects. This means that ordinary poets do not fully understand what they write, since in order to defend one's opinions about any aspect of human life one ultimately needs to have knowledge of the whole of human life.[27]

Socrates goes on to ask Ion whether he needs an explanation of the fact that the same manner of inquiry must hold throughout any art as a whole (532d). The rhapsode's rather emphatic response makes it clear that he does require such an explanation. We ask ourselves why Socrates has bothered to make difficult and confusing arguments about wholes and arts to someone who is at best barely able to grasp them. An answer to this question can perhaps be found in the fact that these difficult arguments do serve Socrates' rhetorical purpose in this section of the dialogue of convincing Ion that he doesn't know anything about interpreting Homer and hence should stick to reciting. That Socrates' rhetoric is having an effect is perhaps indicated by Ion's comment, "I take pleasure in listening to you wise men (sophon)" (532d). This remark perhaps contains a slightly ironic overtone in that it may be taken to imply that Socrates is a specialist in sophistical argumentation, but it also seems to be a fairly good-natured indication that Ion is

---

[27]Compare L. Craig, The War Lover, p. xxx: "[I]t is its revelatory relationship with a permanent reality, including the permanent reality of human dreams and desires that imparts enduring significance - greatness - to a work of art. And can it have this if its maker hasn't first sought and glimpsed that reality? If he is not, that is to say, philosophical?"

genuinely impressed by the power of the philosopher's mind. Ion's comment seems sincere although "unawed"; hence Socrates replies, "I only wish you spoke the truth, Ion" (532d).

This last remark is the first time that Socrates makes use of a phrase related to "speak truly". As I noted above, Ion's view that the truth is nothing all that "difficult" is probably implied by his repeated use of the phrase "You speak truly" (530c, 531d etc.). Socrates seems to pick up on this verbal habit of the rhapsode's and give him an implicit definition of what it <u>really</u> means to speak "truly":

> I only wish you spoke the truth, Ion. But presumably you are wise, you rhapsodes and actors and those men whose poems you sing. As for me, I speak nothing but the truth, as is fitting for a private human being. Now see how what I asked you about just now is an ordinary and private thing and how it belongs to every man to recognize what I said - that, when somebody grasps an art as a whole, the inquiry is the same (532d-e).

Socrates here seems to distinguish between the "wisdom" of the poets which is available only on the basis of some kind of "inspired" insight and his own knowledge of "truths" which <u>any</u> human being should be able to grasp. That is, the persuasiveness of Ion and the poets' rhetoric depends upon its appeal to something that seems profoundly individual about our souls, whereas any human being making use of his reasoning power should be able to see Socrates' point about wholes. Ion's claim to "wisdom" also depends on his speeches being so persuasive that he not be questioned about the basis of this "wisdom", whereas Socrates implies that any claim to "speak truly" must be based on an ability to

explain oneself in terms understandable by all on the basis of their natural reasoning abilities and certain concepts (such as "wholes", "sameness" and so forth) that follow from this ability.

Having clarified his assertion that "when somebody grasps an art as a whole, the inquiry is the same", Socrates now turns to a series of examples which are supposed to prove his point (532e-533c). He introduces these examples with the phrase "Let us grasp (labomen) this by speech". This points to an interesting feature of our psyches, namely the way in which a well-chosen example can make a difficult or abstract proposition suddenly "make sense". Indeed, a truly arresting example can seize hold of one's imagination almost as Ion says that Socrates' first myth lays hold (haptei) of his soul (535a3-4).[23]

And yet if we turn to Socrates' examples themselves, they are somewhat puzzling. His first example is that of a man required to give a judgement about the paintings of various men who possess the art of painting (532e-a). Ion acknowledges that he has never heard of anyone who could provide such a judgement about a single painter such as Polygnotus, but could not do so for anyone else. Now, Ion's art of rhapsody was earlier understood to have two distinct parts, reciting Homer and interpreting Homer (530b-d). The example of an someone speaking about Polygnotus is analogous only to the second aspect of Ion's "art", interpreting Homer. In his role as a pure "reciter" of Homer, Ion is

---

[23]Compare the remarks by Lord Bolingbroke cited in L. Craig, The War Lover, pp. 298-9.

merely a medium; in terms of the painting example, he would be analogous to the paint, not the critic. Thus this example is more evidence of Socrates' intention to "put Ion in his place" of reciting, not interpreting Homer. The second example, of a critic of various sculptors, manifests the same asymmetry in its correspondence to Ion's rhapsodic skill.

Socrates' choice of men who exemplify the art of sculpture is also interesting. As an example of a painter, he cites Polygnotus, who was a celebrated fifth-century painter. As examples of sculptors, on the other hand, he cites three men: Daedalus, Epeius and Theodorus. Of these three, only Theodorus was a "real" person; as to the other two, Daedalus is the legendary inventor of carpentry, and Epeius is mentioned in the Odyssey as the builder of the Trojan horse. That is, the latter two men are purely fictional characters who owe their great reputation in the first place to their presence in the works of the Greek mythological tradition, but in the second place to the rhapsody of men like Ion. Indeed, rather like Ion's victory (or even Ion himself, to an extent, as I suggested above), these men exist only in the medium of speech. And yet it is startling how vivid and lifelike such people can seem to us (compare 535b-c), so much so that it makes perfect sense to us to treat them as examples in an enormous variety of situations. This is nicely illustrated by Ion's response to Socrates question as to whether he has ever known anyone who is adept at explaining the works of one of these sculptors, but not others: "No, by Zeus, I haven't seen this either" (533b). Socrates merely replies "Indeed not, as I for one suppose..." (533b). Indeed not, since neither these men nor their works ever existed.

Socrates now says that the situation with respect to the ability to interpret the works of more than one artist is the same in the spheres of aulos playing, cithara playing, singing to the cithara or rhapsody (533b). These examples differ from painting and sculpture in that the works which they present must be performed and not just displayed; the four types of men cited are, of course, performers and hence the media through which the works of the original artists are transmitted. It is interesting that Socrates chooses to link the art of rhapsody with three arts which are musical (in the modern sense of the word) in nature; Ion's "beautification" (530d) of Homer's words has two components, the "acting" which enhances the words' emotional power through gestures and inflection of the voice, but also the "music" which enhances the words' emotional power by means of singing and playing the lyre. The philosopher again cites four fictional characters as examples of possessors of these arts. Of particular interest is his reference to Phemius the Ithacan rhapsode, who is a counterpart to Ion in the Odyssey. Phemius is forced to sing for the suitors; as Odysseus slaughters the suitors in Book XXII, he begs for his life at the hero's feet, and is spared (330-360). Socrates' implicit linking of Ion to this rhapsode is perhaps less than complementary. This point seems more likely when we consider that there is another rhapsode in the Odyssey, Demodocus the Phaeacian, who appears in a far better light then Phemius; rather than being forced to beg for mercy at Odysseus' feet, Demodocus receives high praise from the hero (VIII.470f). And Socrates' failure to mention Demodocus becomes even more conspicuous when we note that he has just mentioned Epeius (533b1), the builder of the Trojan horse, explicitly mentioned by Odysseus as he asks Demodocus to tell the story of the horse (VIII.493ff). The difference

between the two Homeric rhapsodes is perhaps not so much a matter of character as of circumstances; Demodocus lives among the noble and restrained Phaeacians, while Phemius seems to be essentially the prisoner of the riotous suitors. Thus immediately prior to the first myth of the magnet, which apparently makes the rhapsode entirely dependent on the Muses and the poets, Socrates also indicates the rhapsode's strong links to his audience, and perhaps also hints that Ion's Athenian audience is more akin to the suitors than to the Phaeacians.

These references to rhapsodes in the Odyssey serve to remind the reader that Homer's poem contains discussions of the art of rhapsody which are quite similar to the account of rhapsody given in the myth of the metals. Phemius, begging for his life, says to Odysseus:

> You will be sorry in time to come if you kill the singer
> of songs. I sing to the gods and to human people, and I am
> taught by myself, but the god has inspired in me the song-ways
> of every kind. (XXII.345-8).

Alcinous, arranging entertainment for his guest Odysseus, orders his herald to

> summon also the inspired singer
> Demodokos, for to him the god gave song surpassing
> in power to please, whenever the spirit moves him to singing (VIII.43-45).

Odysseus says to Demodocus:

> Demodokos, above all mortals beside I prize you.

> Surely the Muse, Zeus' daughter or else Apollo has taught you
> for all too right following the tale you sing the Achaians'
> venture, all they did, and had done to them, all the sufferings
> of these Achaians, as if you had been there yourself or heard it
> from one who was (VIII.486-492).

There are numerous passages in a similar vein; my point here is that Socrates' mythic accounts of the rhapsode's divine power (although perhaps not of the poets') can be made to fit almost perfectly with a strictly traditional interpretation of Homer. And I should also take this opportunity to note that a complete understanding of the two myths of the metals would require a careful comparison with all of the evidence in the Iliad and the Odyssey about Homer's understanding of his own activity - a mammoth task which obviously cannot be undertaken in this thesis.

IV: PART II: THE RHAPSODE'S DIVINE INSPIRATION

Ion is at a loss. Any efforts Socrates may have been making to provide him with "hints" as to more adequate answers to the questions which they have been discussing have been ineffective; Ion seems incapable of formulating a coherent account of his own way of life, in particular of its apparently non-rational or "divinely inspired" aspects. Indeed, he does not even think to cite a few passages from Homer dealing with the art of the rhapsode, despite Socrates' prodding him in this direction with the example of Phemius. Unable to counter Socrates' "deconstruction" of his claims to possess a techne, the rhapsode retains the conviction (which he claims to "know well) that he has plenty of

interesting and beautiful things to say about Homer - but only about Homer -, and that many others seem to agree with his self-assessment in this matter. Even more explicitly than before (532bc), he concedes that he can't account for why this is so and explicitly solicits the philosopher for help in explaining and hence justifying his way of life:

> I have nothing to say in response to you, Socrates, about this, but I myself know well that I speak most finely of all human beings about Homer, and I have plenty to say, and everyone else affirms that I speak well about him, but about the others this is not the case. Now then, see what this is. (533c).

However inflated his self-assessment may be as he makes this request, Ion does seem to have a valid point to make to Socrates: you have argued that I do not speak by art, and I cannot refute your argument, but I am aware that I have a power of some kind, and since you have argued that this power is not an art, it is incumbent upon you to explain what it is.

Thus Socrates embarks on his first long speech outlining the "divine power" that moves Ion when he recites Homer (533c-535a). The structure of the speech is somewhat difficult to follow, not to say that the speech seems to be distinctly lacking in structure. Socrates repeats many of his key points over and over again, almost like a sort of chant. In this, the speech is similar to the first long speech in praise of Ion's techne (530b-c), where Socrates repeatedly suggests that the rhapsode must understand the poet's inner meaning. Indeed, both speeches seem to be somewhat ironic examples of the kind of "inspired" or "flowing" speech that is persuasive to Ion's audience - and to Ion. Ion explicitly states that

Socrates' speech lays hold of (or seizes, haptei) his soul (535a). Now, in the second long speech in Part II, Socrates states that a great chain is formed of those hanging from the muses, and adds:

> And we name this "being possessed" (katexetai), and it is very nearly that, for he is held (exetai). ((536a9-b1).

So it seems that Socrates' speech itself has the kind of possessive and captivating effect on Ion that he claims Ion's rhapsody has on his audience. But this means that, in effect, the "deed" of Socrates' speech refutes the speech itself. For however "unstructured" or even "inspired" we may wish to consider Socrates' speech, we can be confident that it is not simply an instance of "irrational divine possession". Rather, it clearly contains arguments which, although they may not be logically convincing to the "objective" reader, are psychologically very convincing to Ion. That is, the speech is, whatever else, a product of an at least partially rational art of rhetoric and psychagogia. We may, of course, wish to say that Socrates is inspired by some sort of philosophic muse to produce this speech, but his own rational knowledge has clearly contributed a great deal to its formulation. As such, Socrates' speech actually serves to demonstrate what I argued in my discussion of Part I, namely that "arts", in this case the art of rhetoric, are somehow a product of both "rational principles" and "divine inspiration", or, if you prefer, that reason itself is somehow divine.

But let us turn to the speech itself. Socrates begins by outlining his "thesis" that the divine power that moves Ion is akin to the effect of a magnet on a chain of iron rings

(533c9-e5). It is interesting that Socrates should compare the "followers" to rings. In the first place, this image clearly implies their inner "emptiness"; they are nothing without the god's inspiration, they cannot move themselves. This is clearly an accurate image of Ion, who, whatever his abilities at transmitting the Homeric "world" to his audience, is such an empty fellow in himself (cf. 535e). Yet it is a strange way to speak of Homer, who, despite the fact that he begins both of his great poems by invoking the Muses to tell the stories of Achilles and Odysseus, is generally conceived of as being much more than simply a medium. We should note, however, that it is an "orthodox" view, in that Homer's words themselves (if taken at face value) assert it. However, Ion clearly does not share this view, at least at the beginning of the dialogue; rather, he shares the ordinary reverence for Homer the man and tries to bask in his reflected glory.

In this image the words produced by the Muses are equivalent to the magnetic force that attracts and holds first Homer, then Ion, and then the audience. Words bear some occult force and as such are the means whereby the rings are first moved and then held. The magnet image does not seem completely accurate as a description of the power of poetic words in that the power is indeed somehow in the words - but along with the substantive content. That is, the rings are moved and held by the words, but there doesn't seem to be anything in this image corresponding to the individual's understanding of the meaning of the words by means of his own rational faculties. Quite the opposite, in fact: Socrates emphasizes that the poets and hence their followers are not in their right minds (533b). In addition, we might note that a ring is always just a ring; it can be moved or held

by external forces, but it cannot move itself or change itself. And yet it seems to be a necessary part of human beings' possessing a rational soul that this soul can change through learning. Indeed, our "felt experience" of our soul is that it is continually "in motion": thinking, desiring, remembering, imagining and so forth. A metal ring removed from the vicinity of a magnet, on the other hand, is simply dead matter. Here, however, we should recall that rings which have been in contact with a magnet for some time remain magnetically charged for some time, although they eventually lose this charge. The analogy between the human soul and a ring can be maintained if we assert that human beings depend for their continued life on periodic contact with the gods, which then provides them with the "inspired energy" to continue functioning for a while. Any "motion" which we feel in our souls is a result of a divine power working on our soul - rather as the gods in the Iliad and the Odyssey produce emotions in the various characters. Thus once again we arrive at the view that the ring image seems to support an orthodox "Homeric" view of the world.

But, to repeat, the ring image implicitly denies that there is any such thing as genuine learning or knowledge; there is only contact with or lack of contact with or movement towards the gods. Thus the image seems to allude to the essentially unteachable nature of "religious" men like Ion. Now, it is obvious that our ability to be emotionally affected by Homer is actually dependent upon our reason in the sense that we have to understand at least something of the meaning of the words in order to be affected by

them.[29] On a strict interpretation of the magnet image, however, this "reason" is simply that property of iron rings which allows them to be attracted to a magnet, and our passions correspond to the motion of the ring. The subordination of reason to emotion implied by the myth of the magnet emerges clearly in Socrates' subsequent examples of Ion "speaking epics well and most amusing the spectators":

> singing of Odysseus leaping on the threshold, revealing himself to the suitors and pouring out arrows before his feet, or of Achilles chasing Hector, or one of the pitiful stories about Andromache, or Hecuba, or Priam... (535b).

On this account, Ion's rhapsodic activity is almost entirely dedicated to depicting emotions, particularly anger, fear and pity, and hence provoking these emotions in the spectators. We might say that the myth of the metals is limited to representing this aspect of Ion's art, ignoring the discursive content of the poems except insofar as this content carries an emotional "charge". In this regard we might recall that in Socrates' only use of the art of rhapsody as an example, he associates it with three other musical (in the modern sense of the term) arts, two of which - aulos playing and cithara playing - do not have a logos component (533b-c). These examples point to the fact that in the myth of the metals, rhapsody is essentially equated to its "musical" or a-logos component.

---

[29]This is perhaps an overstatement, since we can be emotionally affected by a powerful speech in a foreign language which we do not understand, for example. The essential point, however, is that Ion's audience does need to understand something of the meaning of his words; a recitation of the story of Achilles chasing Hector, for example (535b), would lose much of its effect if we couldn't understand the rhapsode's words.

Socrates goes on to explicitly apply the magnet image to epic poets and lyric poets, and perhaps something like it to Corybants and Bacchic dancers (533e5-534a6). The example of the Corybants and the Bacchic dancers is striking in that everyone already regards there people as out of their minds, whereas the poets are usually regarded as somehow inspired, but not as completely out of their own control or "automatic" like the Corybants and Bacchae.

Socrates next proceeds to offer a second image in terms of which to understand the poets and rhapsodes (534a6-b7). He now compares the poet to a bee, culling songs from gardens of the muses and "flying" them to us. The view that poetry is honey, or honey derived, clearly alludes in the first place to the immense pleasure that accompanies the performance of such poetry. It is because this pleasure can distort rational judgement that Socrates argues that poetry in the "city in speech" must be severely censored:

> ...only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city. And if you admit the sweetened muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings in your city instead of law and that argument which in each instance is best in the opinion of the community (Republic 607a).

Of course the bee image is also interesting in that it once again implies the non-rational or non-discursive nature of the poets' "wisdom" - that whatever its power, it is not purely the result of the power of logic. Yet the teaching of the bee image is perhaps also a subtle alteration of that of the magnet image, since magnetism can be thought of as simply an

irrational "force", whereas bees do seem to follow a kind of "built-in" reason in their activities. That is, the magnet image's dismissal of rationality as a mere epiphenomenon is perhaps not the full story; as with bees, poetic inspiration is perhaps somehow the result of a kind of rationality "built in" to nature that is not consciously grasped by its possessor. Indeed, perhaps all human reasoning is to a certain extent instinctive in that it is not an "autonomous" creation of our "wills" in a completely a-rational universe, but rather something that is somehow "built-in" to us, that manifests itself naturally and unselfconsciously in children, and that can be refined in us as adults as we grow more self-conscious about our use of it.[30] In examining the "reason" of an almost completely unselfconscious man like Ion, Socrates is examining the instinctive or natural grounds of his own reasoning activity. That is, in someone whose self-conscious reasoning abilities are as highly developed as those of Socrates, "instinct" has of course to a large extent been replaced or at least covered over by self-conscious products of the philosopher's "will"; to understand the roots of his own activity, he must study an "instinctive" man like Ion. And the discussion does seem to show that even a completely unreflective or "instinctive" man like Ion has some "natural" knowledge of the basic concepts and intellectual operations that form the building blocks of any kind of philosophic account of the world.[31] For example, the rhapsode is able to follow most of Socrates' arguments (at least with a considerable amount of "coaching" and repetition on the philosopher's part), implying

---

[30]Cf. L. Craig, The War Lover, pp. 422-3 note 20.

[31]Compare the passage from A. Kojève's Introduction to the Reading of Hegel which I cite above, pp. 20-21.

that he "instinctively" recognizes the validity of the basic laws of logic. This perhaps emerges most clearly in the rhapsode's demand that Socrates explain the cause of the fact that he speaks well about Homer (532bc): human beings just naturally expect every effect to have had an antecedent cause. This same example also shows that Ion possesses the ability to compare the results of an argument with his own "felt experience", and to demand a different account if he finds that one does not hold up.

In the remainder of the first long speech, Socrates expands on his assertion that poetic "wisdom" is based entirely on "contact" with a given muse (534b7-535a1). And the various muses may contradict one another in their pronouncements, with there being no way in which we can arbitrate between them. Thus each poet is skilled only in a single type of poetry. Socrates reveals the crucial premise of his previous discussion of "art" in his statement that if the poets "knew how to speak finely by art about any one of [the types of poetry], they would be able to do so about all the rest" (534c). As I indicated above, this statement seems to be an exaggeration; it is certainly undeniable that inspiration plays a role in almost any art, and particularly in the "fine arts"; but this is not incompatible with the practitioners of these arts also following a series of more or less well-defined rational rules which regulate their activity. Still, it must be admitted that Socrates' account "saves the phenomena" in that most great poets only practice one genre really well; however necessary the rational rules of the poetic art may be, the poet also clearly needs such "inspiration" to produce his poetry. Socrates' example of Tynnichus the Chalcidean, who apparently was inspired only once, raises the question of why "the gods"

or "nature" inspire some but not others (534d-e). And it must be said that the Ion seems to leave this question of the basis of poetic genius nearly as something essentially mysterious: the myth of the magnet makes the problem clear without really providing a believable solution, or at least without providing a discursive "philosophic" solution.

As I have noted, Socrates still seems to be interested in learning about Ion's rhapsodic activity. The indication that the votary of the muse is himself "empty", combined with the comment that in Tynnichus the Chalcidean the god sang the finest lyric through the most ordinary poet (534e), seem to show that at least one of Socrates' purposes in this part of the dialogue remains to try to elicit from Ion an account of his own activity. Ion is enthusiastic about Socrates' "poetic" description of the poets; responding to Socrates' question as to whether it seems that Socrates speaks the truth, he says:

> Yes, by Zeus, to me you do. For somehow you lay hold of my soul with these speeches, Socrates, and I believe that the good poets are interpreters of these things from the gods through divine dispensation (535a).

Socrates' interest in obtaining from Ion an account of his experience of his own activity continues as he asks, "Now, don't you rhapsodes, in turn, interpret the things of the poets? ... Are you interpreters of interpreters?" (535a). And now the philosopher makes the request that Ion not hide anything from him (535b1), and Ion explicitly agrees to this request (535c5). This is a very reasonable concern in that Ion's entire life is essentially devoted to creating appearances or acting; it may be very difficult to penetrate these veils of deception to find the underlying truth. It is also interesting that Socrates has compared

Ion's rhapsody to the dances of Bacchic and Corybantic revellers (533e-a); Ion's skill is somehow a "mystery" that perhaps ought not to be profaned. This should be compared with a passage in the Apology of Socrates where Socrates indicates that he was "ashamed" to tell the jury the truth that the poets do not understand their own poetry (22b). The poets' inability to explain their own poems would seem to be shameful only if one believes (as Socrates does?) that there is no such thing as divine revelation. And we should note in the Ion, the myth of the magnet's argument that even the very greatest poets are "empty" in themselves have created a situation in which there is nothing shameful in Ion's admitting that he too is "empty".

Socrates continues to press Ion for details about the nature of the rhapsodic "experience", citing several dramatic events in the Iliad and the Odyssey and asking whether Ion actually becomes beside himself and think that he is at the scene of the deeds of which he speaks (535b-c). Ion responds that he finds Socrates' proof extremely vivid and that he is genuinely emotionally affected as he performs (535c). However, when Socrates asks Ion whether he knows that he works these effects on the spectators, the rhapsode replies:

> Indeed I do know it very finely. For I look down on them each time from the platform above as they are crying, casting terrible looks and following with astonishment the things said. I must pay the very closest attention to them, since, if I set them to crying, I shall laugh myself because I am making money, but if they laugh, then I shall cry because of the money I am

losing (535e).

How are we to reconcile these two apparently conflicting accounts of Ion's "experience"? Is he swept away by his imagination and his passions as he recites, or is he thinking only of the box office receipts as he performs? I think that these two statements can be reconciled if we recognize that there is a radical difference between the "acting" Ion and the "ordinary" or "everyday" Ion. That is, in everyday life, Ion, like most of the people in the audience which he entertains, is rather excessively attached to wealth, or "bourgeois". However, when he performs on stage, he is genuinely "inspired" or swept away by noble epic emotion. This is perfectly compatible with paying the closest attention to his audience: a skilled actor is able to judge the effect of his performance on his audience from moment to moment, but he also "feeds" off the power generated by a mass emotional response. So why does Ion here speak as though the members of his audience were sheep whom he fleeces? Perhaps we can understand this as simply one more way in which Ion does not fully understand his own "art" of rhapsody.

So we see that two somewhat contradictory elements co-exist in Ion's soul, the rather bourgeois "everyday" man and the noble reciter of Homer. Immediately after Ion has made his statement about laughing while his audience cries, Socrates embarks on his second version of the "myth of the magnet". How does this myth respond to the problem of Ion's "bourgeoisification"? We get our first clue to the answer to this question when we notice that the first long speech, about which Ion was so enthusiastic, actually contained no mention of rhapsodes; it dealt entirely with the activities of poets, and Ion, probably

without really thinking about it, was simply pleased to shine in their reflected glory. Immediately after the first long speech, Socrates turned explicitly to an examination of the rhapsode, the interpreter of the interpreters of the muse (535a). Now, immediately after Ion's revelation of his "heart of utter darkness", Socrates launches into a second major speech describing poetic inspiration. Why is a second speech necessary? What has changed from one speech to another? The answer to these questions is provided by the first sentence of the second speech: "You know, then, that the spectator is the last of the rings which I said get their power from one another through the Heraclean stone?" (535e). That is, Ion is no longer anything all that special; he is just one of a large number of inspired followers of the god. This theme is present throughout the first half of Socrates' speech (535e7-536b4): the philosopher speaks of "a very great chain ... of dancers, choral masters, assistant masters" (536a), and adds that "the many (oi de polloi) are possessed and held by Homer" (536b). He goes on to state that Ion is but one of these "many" (536b). Thus Ion has been reduced to the status of just another stage hand, or even just another member of the masses. Socrates concludes his second long speech with a section making sure that Ion understands how this teaching applies to him in particular (536b4-d3). If Ion can somehow be persuaded to accept this account of his activity it will, as I argued in chapter 2, benefit both the rhapsode and the city of Athens. If Ion were to genuinely believe something like this account, his vanity would be greatly curtailed (making him better), and he would - even in his everyday life - regard the audience as fellow participants in a noble spiritual experience rather than as sheep to be exploited for his own benefit. Furthermore, he would not, of course, further undermine religious belief

in Athens by publicizing any "philosophic" accounts of Homer which he may have come across, nor would he any longer believe those accounts himself. But, of course, the real problem is whether Ion can be convinced to accept the second version of the myth, for by making Ion just another one of the masses of people who are "held" by Homer it is distinctly less flattering than the first myth.

> Socrates concludes the second myth of the magnet as follows:
> And the cause, for which you ask me, of your having plenty to say about Homer and not about the others is that you are a clever praiser of Homer not by art but by divine dispensation (536d).

Now, up until this point, the two myths and the intervening discussion have apparently dealt with only one of the elements of Ion's rhapsodic skill, namely his ability to recite Homer. However, Socrates now argues that the second element of the rhapsode's skill, his ability to interpret Homer, is also dependent on divine inspiration. To this new contention Ion responds:

> You speak well, Socrates. But I should be surprised if you could speak so well as to persuade me that I am possessed and am mad when I praise Homer. Nor do I believe that I would appear so to you if you heard me speaking about Homer (536d).

Again, Socrates seems to be steering Ion away from attempting to interpret Homer, and particularly from attempting anything like a rationalistic interpretation along the lines of Stesimbrotus and Metrodorus. However, although Ion seems to be persuaded by the myth

of the magnet as an account of his magical powers of rhapsodic performance, he still wants to lay claim to an art of interpreting Homer. Thus Socrates embarks on a second long cross examination designed to undermine Ion's claims to knowledge about Homer.

V: PART III: THE TECHNE OF THE RHAPSODE PART II AND CONCLUSION

Socrates faces a difficult rhetorical challenge at the beginning of his third cross-examination of Ion. The philosopher's goal is to convince the rhapsode that his activity is entirely a result of "divine inspiration"; but Ion's vanity and the fact that the assertion that the interpretive part of his art is also divinely inspired probably does not square with the rhapsode's experience make this a very difficult task. Socrates' tactic is to return to the dichotomy of Part I - either Ion possesses an art or he is divinely inspired - and to undermine Ion's claim to possess an art, thereby leaving him no choice but to be held divinely inspired. He begins by asking Ion, "[A]bout which one of the things about which Homer speaks do you speak well?" (536de). That is, in response to Ion's claim to be "sober" when he praises Homer, Socrates returns to the assumption that Ion must be claiming to possess an art of rhapsody, and that this art must deal with some one specialized element of the Homeric world. Ion again recognizes that this assumption is somehow false: a good interpreter must somehow be able to speak well about all elements of Homer (536e).

In response to Ion's claim to be able to speak well about all things in Homer,

Socrates says:

> But surely not about those things you don't happen to know and about which Homer speaks? (536e).

This statement points to another assumption that Socrates will maintain throughout the subsequent discussion, namely that praising presupposes knowledge of the object praised. Socrates goes on to assert that Ion cannot possibly speak about those things in Homer about which he doesn't happen to know. Ion somewhat petulantly asks what sort of things are those about which Homer speaks and which he does not know (536e). This provides Socrates with the opportunity to begin a long exposition of another assumption underlying his claims, namely that each art has been assigned the power of knowing some one work (537c), and that this work cannot be known by any other art (537d). Socrates' first example is that of charioteering; he has Ion cite a passage from Book 23 of the Iliad in which Nestor is giving his son some rather unscrupulous advice on how to win at the horse race in memory of Patroclus. This allows Ion to show off his primary talent, reminding him of the rhapsodic experience. Indeed, this is our only example in the dialogue of a talent that Ion genuinely does possess, namely reciting specific passages upon request. When Socrates offers to recite verses about charioteering, Ion says eagerly, "I'll do it, for I remember" (537a). It is interesting that despite the fact that Socrates elsewhere drops some very broad hints that could encourage Ion to recite specific passages from Homer, it only occurs to Ion to do this when he is specifically prompted to do so by Socrates.

It is also interesting that Socrates should cite a passage in which a religious event becomes an opportunity for unscrupulous competition. Nestor's advice to his son is to allow the wheel of his chariot to seem to graze the turning post, but to "beware of touching the stone" (XXIII.340). This image bears a striking resemblance to the myth of the magnet, in that a wheel is somewhat reminiscent of a ring. The passage may be understood as Plato's ironic advice to the philosophic reader to "come close" to poetry in the sense of investigating it, but to avoid being seized and held by its rhetorical power. That is, don't be mindlessly captivated by Homer (cf. 534b), accepting whatever he exemplifies, if truth and knowledge are your first concern (as they are not for Ion or most of his audience). In this regard, it is interesting that when Socrates asks who would judge this passage rightly, the alternative he cites to the charioteer is the doctor. That is, in judging this passage in Plato's work, perhaps it is the "soul doctor" who can interpret its teaching regarding the dangers of poetry correctly.

Socrates goes on to discuss in further detail his thesis that arts differ as to the objects of their knowledge (537c-538b). This is undoubtedly true in the strict sense, but, as I have noted, Socrates ignores the fact that the same object can be known in different aspects or even different ways. The underlying issue here is probably religion versus philosophy, with each offering an account of the same object: the whole. In this regard we might note that there may well be two different ways of knowing Homer, namely Ion's religious or dogmatic account, and the philosophic knowledge of Homer's works which Socrates clearly possesses. And, to repeat, Socrates' purpose in this dialogue seems to be

to encourage Ion to stick with his religious "knowledge" of Homer and not to attempt to acquire anything approaching a philosophic understanding of the text. This would seem to be the reason that the philosopher expresses his thesis that arts differ as to the objects of their knowledge in overtly religious terms:

> Then each of the arts has been assigned by the god the power of knowing some work, has it not? (537c).

Socrates seems to imply to Ion that it is Apollo himself who limits Ion's sphere of competence to reciting as opposed to interpreting Homer. The philosopher also encourages Ion to regard each art as knowledge of a closed "sphere" of the world through a subtle change which he makes in his descriptions of what each art knows. In the sentence at 537c5-6 which I have just quoted, arts differ on the basis of the work (ergon) that they know. By 537d5-e1, the philosopher simply asserts that arts differ on the basis of the "things" that they know. Now, different arts can know the same object in different aspects in that they "work" on it differently. This is implied by Socrates' example of carpentering (537d5), which should remind us of the previous example of Epeius, the builder of the Trojan horse. At 533b Socrates refers to Epeius as one of a number of sculptors. Very likely Epeius worked on the horse together with a number of carpenters who were subordinate to him. That is, both the sculptor and the carpenters worked on the same "thing", the horse; they differed in the type of work which they performed on this single object. Yet the implication which Socrates will draw from his assertion that each art knows only one set of things is that any "object" that falls within the sphere of competence of one art cannot also fall within the sphere of competence of another art (537e1-4).

As an example of this last point, Socrates cites the art of arithmetic ("counting"), stating that both he and Ion know that he has five fingers through their possession of this art (537e). This example is strange since we do not generally think of our ability to recognize five x's as evidence of our possession of a (specialized) art of counting; the recognition of "fiveness" is rather a skill which any mentally competent adult should possess. That is, we can "instinctively" see "fiveness" in a way in which we cannot see "fifty-threeness". Or, to put this another way, the "art" of counting seems to be a sub-art that is required to differing degrees by many of the specialized arts: almost any artisan will need to know how to count to ten, a few will need to know how to deal with larger numbers, and so forth.[32] In this regard, it is worth noting that prior to the invention of "arabic" numbering, the ability to add larger numbers was a specialized art. The important point seems to be, however, that all such "higher" mathematical operations depend on our "instinctive" ability to "see" small numbers. Indeed, Socrates probably holds up his hand when he says, "I know that these fingers here are five". This could remind us of the typical manner in which children are taught basic numbers: one draws their attention repeatedly to objects manifesting "fiveness" (or whatever number), and they eventually grasp the meaning of "fiveness" as such.

Socrates repeats his point that each art has a specific set of objects which it knows and that these sets are "closed" in the sense that objects within the set of one art cannot be known by another art (538a1-4). However, he introduces another subtle variation in this

---

[32]Compare Republic 522d.

point when he repeats it yet again:

> Then whoever does not have a certain art will not be able to know in a fine (kalos) way the things of that art which are finely (kalos) said or done, will he? (538a5-7).[33]

This is the first use in the dialogue of a term related to "speak finely"; up until this point, Socrates has generally referred to possessors of arts as "speaking well" about their subject matters (531df, 536e, etc.) The philosopher goes on to get Ion to (re-)affirm that a charioteer rather than a rhapsode will "know in a finer way about whether the verses [Ion] just recited were finely said by Homer or not" (538b). The point of this sudden emphasis on "speaking finely" as opposed to speaking well would seem to be to try to prod Ion into making the assertion that the rhapsode can judge the beauty of the cited passage (or whether Homer "speaks finely") whereas it is the charioteer who can judge the truth of the passage as an accurate description of a method of winning a chariot race (or whether Homer "speaks well").

I have noted that Socrates' discussion seems extremely repetitive: he seems to be at pains to make all of his points several times. I have also noted that the philosopher uses these repetitions to make subtle alterations in his assertions. These alterations may constitute a "test" of the rhapsode to see if he notices them - as he did, in fact, notice when Socrates switched from asserting that rhapsodes are divinely inspired when they

---

[33]Note that this sentence is quite difficult to translate into English and that the word "fine" (kalos) actually only occurs once in it.

recite Homer to asserting that rhapsodes are divinely inspired when the praise or interpret Homer (536d). At a more basic level, this continual repetition probably has a lot to do with Ion's lack of philosophic gifts; much like a child learning to count (compare my discussion of arithmetic above), Ion needs to have points repeated several times before he grasps them. It also may be the case that Socrates believes that - as with his longer "mythic" speeches - repetition in and of itself may be a useful rhetorical technique in persuading Ion to accept various points.

In this spirit the philosopher goes on to cite two more examples of verses from the Iliad that are supposedly better judged by a possessor of a specialized art than by the rhapsode (538b-d). The first example is a description of the manner in which Nestor's concubine prepares a potion for the wounded Machaon to drink in Book XI of the Iliad. In this example, we can note that even if a doctor were to judge the proffered food and drink to be unsound, this would be no reflection on Homer, but rather on the character who does it, or the state of medical knowledge at the time of the Iliad, and so forth. This is in contrast to the charioteering example, where if we are to believe that Nestor is a wise and shrewd old man, Homer must know something about charioteering in order to put into his mouth words that constitute prudent advice about how to win a chariot race. The passage about Nestor's concubine is also interesting in terms of my discussion of the fact that cooks tend to set themselves up autonomously from doctors and produce foods that please their customers' palates rather than benefiting their bodies. The passage indicates that the slave woman added an onion as a relish to make the drink more pleasing; of

course, making the drink more pleasurable in order to distract Machaon from his pain may be a medically sound thing to do. The passage also contains interesting reflexive possibilities in that Machaon himself is a doctor. Now, I noted at the outset of my thesis that Socrates seemed quite familiar with Ion's rhapsodic "art". Perhaps Socrates (the "soul doctor") corresponds to Machaon and Ion's rhapsodic recitations to the slave girl's potions in that even Socrates' soul is occasionally "wounded" and can benefit from a "potion" of pleasing rhapsody. After all, like the onion, the pleasurable beauty of "inspired" poetry can be a good thing in moderate quantities.

The second example is a description of Iris, the messenger of the gods, sinking beneath the waves on an errand for Zeus (538d). This passage is a metaphor, and as such the rhapsode would almost surely be a better judge of whether the words are spoken "finely" than the fisherman.

Socrates goes on to demonstrate his ability to find passages that are best considered by the art of the diviner, thus showing his own knowledge of Homer. He asks Ion to do the same for the art of the rhapsode (538d-539e). For the first and only time he quotes a passage from the Odyssey, explicitly mentioning the fact that the passage is from this work (538e6). This seems to be a hint to Ion to remember Socrates' earlier seemingly casual reference to a character from the Odyssey who presumably could be judged by the art of the rhapsode, namely Phemius the Ithacan rhapsode (533c). It is also interesting in that the speaker of the passage is Theoclymenes who, as Socrates emphasizes by explicitly

noting that he is of the Melampid line, inherited his skills as a diviner. (XV.225ff). Socrates' concluding remark that the diviner is the appropriate man to consider the two passages which he has cited is perhaps true in the sense that a diviner would be able to judge the Homeric diviners' "technique". However, human beings' major interest in divination is in the accuracy of its results; and since every reader of Homer knows whether or not these two predictions were accurate, anyone should be able to judge the diviners' competence (in contrast to the situation in "real life").[34]

Socrates has provided a demonstration of his ability to be told "find passages related to divination" and then to recite them. He now explicitly asks Ion to do the same for passages related to the rhapsode's art (539e). This is the most obvious indication yet that Socrates wants Ion to cite passages relating to either Demodocus' or Phemius' rhapsody. Ion, however, is either unable to see Socrates' point or unwilling to comply; he repeats his assertion that "all things" in Homer belong to the rhapsode's art. Socrates patiently repeats his point about the difference between the rhapsode's art and the charioteer's (540a). Ion eventually manages to formulate the thought that the rhapsode will deal with "[e]verything, except, perhaps, such things", meaning the objects of the specialized arts (540a). As Ion clarifies it, this involves knowing "[t]he things that are appropriate... for a man to say, and the sort for a woman, and the sort for a slave and the sort for a free man, and the sort for one who is ruled and the sort for one who is ruling" (540b). This is actually a reasonably good reply in that Ion claims that the man who

---

[34]See the Herodotus quotation on p. 86, note 25.

possesses a true rhapsodic art of interpreting poetry must know the whole of the poem, and hence the whole of the human realm. Socrates gives a number of rather strange examples of people whom Ion concedes will be better judged by the possessor of the relevant specialized art than by the rhapsode (540b-d). Socrates again seems to be trying to get Ion to recall relevant passages from Homer. The ruler of a ship caught in a storm seems to correspond to Odysseus (Odyssey X.28-55, XII.404ff). The doctor seems to correspond to Machaon and Podaleirios, the sons of Asclepius (Iliad, 2.729-33, 4.192-218, 11.504-520). The slave who is a cowherd seems to correspond to the noble Eumaios, who tended Odysseus' cattle while the hero was gone (Odyssey XX.209-213). A spinning woman seems to correspond to Penelope (Odyssey II.94-110, XVII.96-97). However, Ion remains unwilling or perhaps unable to take Socrates' hints; if the latter is the case, his status as a mere reciter who hardly understands the words he recites is confirmed.

Socrates' final example is of a general knowing what is appropriate to say when he exhorts his troops (540d). Now, the most famous instance of such knowledge and lack of knowledge in the Iliad is of course Agamemnon's "testing" of his army in Book II. His speech is so poorly judged by him, so inappropriate, that it almost results in his entire army packing up and leaving; the situation is only saved by the "safe speaker" Odysseus. Interestingly, Agamemnon is prompted to make the speech in the first place by an Evil dream sent to him by Zeus encouraging him to attack Troy. The test itself is Agamemnon's own idea (II.1ff). We may very well wonder what kind of "general" the "divinely inspired" Ion would make. In any case, Ion asserts that the rhapsode will know

the kinds of things a general should say, which Socrates quickly transforms into a positive claim to be an expert at generalship (strategikos) (540d). Ion is apparently very pleased to have discovered an "expertise" for himself that is "appropriate" or honourable. That is, generalship deals with the "whole" in a sense in that the good of the whole political community often rests on its decisions. Furthermore, generals make speeches about "the whole" to their armies, arguing about what is good for the army and the country, and often promising divine assistance in their battle. Indeed, the only true common ground between the rhapsode and the general seems to be that both need the ability to inspire large audiences if they are to be successful; the greatest difference between the two would seem to be the fact that in order to be successful, the general requires a knowledge of strategy as well as persuasive ability. It is probably this superficial similarity which Ion thinks lends an air of plausibility to his claim to be a general. Of course, by this point in the conversation he's getting pretty desperate to find something "noble" about which he can make some kind of claim to be an expert. We can imagine that he's not too pleased at the prospect of being judged an expert judge of the speeches of the cowherd or the spinning woman (540c)! Of course, if Ion's rhapsody possesses the ability to allow the common people to purge their passions, he may have more in common with a cowherd who can calm angry cattle than he thinks.

Ion is quickly led to argue that the art of rhapsody and the art of generalship are equivalent, and hence that since he is the greatest rhapsode in Greece, he is also its greatest general (541b). Having pushed Ion into claiming this absurdity, Socrates asks why

he goes around being a rhapsode when Greece has such a great need of generals. When Ion replies that the Athenians and Spartans will not hire him, Socrates responds that the Athenians are open to employing foreigners as generals. He concludes this line of inquiry with the following almost sarcastic statement:

> Why then, will [Athens] not choose Ion of Ephesus as general and honour him if he should appear worthy of mention? Weren't you Ephesians originally Athenians and isn't Ephesus a city inferior to none? (541d-e).

Knowing that he cannot possibly win an argument against Socrates, Ion apparently simply remains silent, having nothing to say (compare 533c).

There is perhaps a pause in the conversation before Socrates resumes his discussion, accusing Ion of injustice and making explicit the choice that has undergirded the discussion almost from the start: either Ion speaks of Homer by art and knowledge, or is possessed by Homer by divine dispensation (541e-542b). Ion is unjust if he has knowledge of many fine things about Homer and refuses to share it, since he has promised to make a display. Note that Socrates now states that Ion is possessed by Homer "by divine dispensation" (542a4), subtly undercutting the view expressed in the myth of the magnet that poetic inspiration is produced entirely by the gods.

Socrates goes on to compare the rhapsode to the shape-shifting Proteus, who transforms himself into a variety of shapes in an attempt to avoid being forced to reveal his

prophetic wisdom to Menelaos.[35] We may perhaps take Socrates at least partially at his word in that he did have genuine hopes of learning something about Homer and the mysterious art of poetry in the course of his conversation with Ion, and these hopes have been largely frustrated by Ion's lack of self-consciousness and inability to express himself clearly. Indeed, the Proteus image is perhaps an appropriate image with which to conclude any dialogue about "poetic inspiration", in that it seems that any attempt to "pin down" this mysterious faculty faces an "opponent" who "assumes all sorts of shapes, twisting this way and that" before finally escaping our grasp in some guise, some appearance which we know is not the "full story". For we should note that this is Socrates' major change in the Proteus story: Menelaos successfully forced the "ever-truthful old man of the sea" (Odyssey IV.349) to reveal his wisdom, whereas Socrates' quarry eludes him.

The dialogue ends as Ion, confronted with the choice of being held unjust or divine, states, "There is a great difference, Socrates. For to be held divine is far finer" (542b). Socrates interprets this somewhat tentative statement on Ion's part as a clear decision in favour of "divinity". We do not hear Ion's reply, and are left to wonder the extent to which Socrates' rhetoric has been effective.

---

[35]Odyssey IV.347-570.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bloom, Allan. "An Interpretation of Plato's Ion". In Thomas Pangle, ed., The Roots of Political Philosophy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Bowen, Alan C. "On Interpreting Plato". In Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Craig, Leon Harold. The War Lover: A Study of Plato's *Republic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Delcourt, Marie. "Socrate, Ion, et la poésie: la structure dialectique de l'Ion de Platon". Bulletin de l'association Guillaume Budé 55 (April 1937), pp. 4-14.

Desjardins, Rosemary. "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play". In Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Dorter, Kenneth. "The Ion: Plato's Characterization of Art". Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 32 (1973), pp. 65-78.

Euripides. Ion. W. S. Di Piero, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Flashar, Hellmut. Der Dialog *Ion* als Zeugnis Platonischer Philosophie. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958.

Griswold, Charles L., Jr. "Introduction". In Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Griswold, Charles L., Jr. "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues". In Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Hammond, N. G. L. and H. H. Scullard, edd. The Oxford Classical Dictionary, second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Hegel, G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. A. V. Miller, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Herodotus. The History. David Greene, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Homer. The Iliad of Homer. Richmond Lattimore, trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951.

Homer. The Odyssey of Homer. Richmond Lattimore, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

Janaway, Christopher. "Craft and Fineness in Plato's Ion". Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 10 (1992), pp. 1-23.

Kagan, Donald. The Fall of the Athenian Empire. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Klein, Jacob. A Commentary on Plato's *Meno*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965; reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Kojève, Alexandre. Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. James H. Nichols, Jr., trans. New York: Basic Books, 1969; reprinted Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Ladrière, Craig. "The Problem of Plato's Ion". Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 10 (1951), pp. 26-34.

Liddell, H. G., and Scott, R. A Greek-English Lexicon, ninth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Mittelstrass, Jürgen. "On Socratic Dialogue". In Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Moore, John D. "The Dating of Plato's Ion". Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 15 (1974), pp. 421-40.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. Walter Kaufmann, trans., in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche. New York: Modern Library, 1968.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Birth of Tragedy. Walter Kaufmann, trans., in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche. New York: Modern Library, 1968.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life". In R. J. Hollingdale, trans., Untimely Meditations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Pangle, Thomas. "Editor's Introduction". In Thomas Pangle, ed., The Roots of Political Philosophy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Plato. Apology of Socrates. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, trans., in Four Texts on Socrates. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Plato. Ion. Allan Bloom, trans., in Thomas Pangle, ed., The Roots of Political Philosophy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Plato. Ion. In John Burnet, ed., Platonis Opera. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903.

Plato. Ion. In Penelope Murray, ed., Plato On Poetry, with Penelope Murray, "Introduction" and "Commentary". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Plato. Ion. W. R. M. Lamb, trans., in The Statesman - Philebus - Ion. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925.

Plato. Ion. With J. M. MacGregor, "Introduction" and "Notes". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Plato. Phaedrus. Harold North Fowler, trans., in Euthyphro - Apology - Crito - Phaedo - Phaedrus. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Plato. The Republic of Plato, second edition. Allan Bloom, trans. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Plato. Seventh Letter. R. G. Bury, trans., in Timaeus - Critias - Cleitophon - Menexenus - Epistles. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.

Ranta, Jerrald. "The Drama of Plato's Ion". Journal Of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 26 (1967), pp. 219-229.

Rosen, Stanley. Hermeneutics as Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Rosen, Stanley. Plato's *Sophist*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Rosen, Stanley. Plato's *Symposium*, second edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Saxonhouse, Arlene. Fear of Diversity. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato. William Dobson, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1836.

Shorey, Paul. What Plato Said. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933.

Strauss, Leo. The City and Man. New York: Rand McNally, 1964; reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Strauss, Leo. "Exoteric Teaching". In Thomas Pangle, ed., The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Strauss, Leo. "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing". In What is Political Philosophy?. Glencoe, NY: Free Press, 1959; reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Strauss, Leo. "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy". Social Research 13 (1946), pp. 326-67.

Strauss, Leo. "On Plato's Apology of Socrates and Crito". In Leo Strauss, Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy, ed. Thomas Pangle. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Strauss, Leo. Persecution and the Art of Writing. Glencoe, NY: Free Press, 1952; reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Strauss, Leo. Thoughts on Machiavelli. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Taylor, A. E. Plato: The Man and His Work. New York: Meridan, 1956.

Tigerstedt, E. N. Interpreting Plato. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977.

Verdenius, W. J. "L'*Ion* de Platon". Mnemosyne 11 (1943), pp. 233-62.

Xenophon. Memorabilia. E. C. Marchant, trans., in Memorabilia and Oeconomicus - Symposium and Apology. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923.